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### **Reading witches, reading women : late Tudor and early Stuart texts**

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**READING WITCHES, READING WOMEN: LATE TUDOR AND EARLY STUART TEXTS**

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April, 2001

Submitted in candidature for the PhD degree in English  
at the University of Wales, Bangor

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## ABSTRACT

The introduction discusses the problematics involved in developing a feminist theory of late Renaissance and early modern witchcraft. It includes an overview of both Renaissance feminist theory and witchcraft studies, and posits that the witch is a hybrid, multivalent figure. Chapter one examines contemporary sources for portrayals of witches. The second chapter analyses the roles of witches, hags, and viragos in The Faerie Queene. Throughout the work their femininity is problematised, its meaning displaced onto horrific figures or fragmented into "good" and "bad" women. Both inspire dis-ease. Lyly's Endimion introduces a witch in the Thessalian tradition and women whose transgressions lie in daring to act and speak. Chapter three expands the definition of witch to other unruly women, including the shrew and the power-wielding woman; it also proves that Dipsas' power is the strongest in the play. Chapter four analyses the way in which the definition of witchcraft can be imposed on a woman by exterior societal forces, with reference to The Witch of Edmonton. Also discussed are the role of cursing and the problematics of female sexuality.

Chapters five through eight discuss Shakespeare. Shakespeare's Joan of Arc is fragmented and reflects the varying views about her, and again shows how one woman may be variously defined. With Joan's death, Margaret of Anjou becomes the virile woman in the tetralogy. She and other women who share her verbal potency are condemned not only by the men in the plays but also by critics who erroneously take the negative view as definitive. Macbeth concerns itself with exploration of gender, androgyny, power (occult and otherwise) and its betrayal. Chapter eight outlines how the women in other Shakespearean plays do not achieve dramatic impact as witches because they are robbed of primary agency in the plays.

Chapter nine demonstrates how Middleton distances his Heecat and proves that the real witches and villains lie in the structure of the patriarchy of The Witch. Lyly combines cunning woman with Sibyl in Mother Bombie; wit defines wisdom. Chapter eleven presents The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon, an anomaly in that the witch-figure and unruly characters of both sexes are not condemned and have happy resolutions. The conclusion summarises briefly and outlines areas of further study. Appendix A is a table; Appendix B outlines the role of cursing as gendered speech in Shakespeare's first tetralogy.

## DEDICATION

For my parents, and all I know who are outspoken and unruly.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

*The humors of men, see how froward they bee,  
We know not to please them in any degree  
For if we goe plaine we are sluts they do say,  
They doubt of our honesty if we goe gay;  
If we be honest and merrie, for giglots they take us,  
If modest and sober, then proud they doe make us  
Be we housewifely quicke, then a shrew he doth keepe,  
If patient and milde, then he scorneth a sheepe.  
What can we devise to doe or to say,  
But men doe wrest all things the contrary way.<sup>1</sup>*

Finding or forging a feminist theory of early modern English witchcraft, particularly literary witchcraft, requires a devotion to the art of decoding both language and symbols (or language as symbol), a willingness to submerge oneself not only in literature but in history and the occult subtexts therein, and a set of cards to tease apart the tangled skeins of various period and modern rhetoricians and critics. While the task is easier today than it was a quarter of a century ago, or even ten years ago--one need not, for example, spend the first part of analysis proving that gender politics are both a valid issue and one relevant to a discussion of witchcraft and its imagery--synthesising any kind of occult literary overview for the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras requires surmounting a relative paucity of directly relevant material. Since the publication of Keith Thomas's seminal work Religion and the Decline of Magic, witchcraft studies have increased, particularly in sociology, history, and to a lesser extent anthropology.<sup>2</sup> These fields deal eagerly and easily with witchcraft as a genre. New historicists acknowledge the necessity, particularly in the early modern period, of recognising history and literature as symbiotic and at times iconographic.

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<sup>1</sup>Ester Sowernam, Ester Hath Hang'd Haman (London, 1617) H2.

<sup>2</sup>1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.



Texts abound which prominently feature witches and those who are often synonymous with them, viragos and hags. Yet though increasing numbers of critics, both male and female, comment on Shakespeare's *women*, few discuss his witches, or at least those (and there are quite a few) not in Macbeth. Commentary on Spenser's The Faerie Queene is prolific. Not so analysis of his hags and witches *as* hags and witches, and not just allegory. Lyly, whose women in Endimion and Mother Bombie both engage period discussion about virtuous women and whose shrews and hags easily link into modern feminist discussion about women's voices and the suppression and finding thereof, is sadly neglected. Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton, based on an actual (if sensationalist) trial, demonstrates a surprisingly "modern" understanding of the scapegoating of old women as witches, and yet is little studied. The list continues.

Research on the history of witchcraft and formulations both of Renaissance feminism and the development, both ideological and literary, of the Renaissance woman have picked up momentum in the 1990s. However, apart from isolated instances such as C. L'Estrange Ewen's Witch Hunting and Witch Trials (originally published in the late 1920s) and the now largely-discounted Margaret Murray, witchcraft studies gained both their feet and respectability with the advent of Thomas' work and Alan Macfarlane's more modest, but insightful and penetrating Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this introduction, the use of gendered terminology, from the cards in the first sentence, is deliberate. Until relatively recently, what almost all of the major historical studies have lacked is an awareness of the witchcraft hunts and trials as exercises in politics--specifically gender politics. Anne Llewellyn Barstow provides a useful overview of historians and sociologists from Ewen until the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge, 1970). James Sharpe notes that "Norman Cohn has performed an exceptionally effective demolition job on her [Murray's] theories." Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996) 8.

Barstow notes that Ewen condescends to the women his study covers, and also denies that sex, sexual difference, and women constitute valid categories of study: "Although he [Ewen] conceded that 'occasionally the witches did possess abnormal power,' he had little awareness of the positive role they had filled in pre-modern society as healers and diviners; instead, he perpetuated the worst of the 'hag' stereotype about these women."<sup>5</sup> "Hag" here is negative and disempowered, which it need not be. In fact, Renaissance literary hags often possess more power than some concede them, though their powers vary from direct occult skill to the ability to inspire reflection in readers or audience. Also encoded in the citation is one of the problems one faces in some analyses, particularly those of the 1980s: the concern of authors to claim a continuous history of practical and practising female witchcraft from medieval times (or earlier) to the present day.<sup>6</sup> These accounts, whilst accurate in their criticism, tend to over-privilege the powers the early modern and medieval witches allegedly possessed, combining the undoubtedly valid wisdom of the white witch, cunning man, and local diviner with the more suspect powers of those witches forced to confess during the hunts and trials.

Thomas and Macfarlane both acknowledge that confession under various pressures and tortures may be suspect. However, despite this small victory, Barstow critiques Thomas and notes that Macfarlane denies "hostility between the sexes." Furthermore, she observes,

Keith Thomas in his influential study of English folk religion concurred with Macfarlane. While denying that either misogyny or psychological factors mattered, he made the useful point that economic and social considerations are valid, because women 'were the most dependent members of the community, and thus the most vulnerable to accusation.' He also pointed out that charges of female sexual

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<sup>4</sup>Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History," Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion (1980) 7-19.

<sup>5</sup>Barstow 11.

<sup>6</sup>For an intelligent and well-researched account of modern Wicca and neo-pagan practices, I refer the reader to Margot Adler's Drawing Down the Moon (1979; Boston: Beacon, 1986). Also see Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (London: Routledge, 1996).



irregularities--illegitimacy, promiscuity, sexual voracity--figured in the trials, but he seemed not to realise that these are the stuff of which misogyny is made.<sup>7</sup>

Gender and sex are intertwined in both the historical trials, the pamphlet reports, and the literature of the period. Practising witches, in addition to causing property damage, were increasingly accused of sexual deviancy and sexual crimes. As Barstow summarises, "women were blamed for preventing conception, causing miscarriage, abortion, and stillbirth, making men impotent, seducing men, having sex with the devil, giving birth to demons."<sup>8</sup> This link with sexual deviance as patriarchal society interpreted it is perpetuated in literature.

For a long while the sheer weight of the scholarship and research in Religion and the Decline of Magic blinded critics to some of the work's flaws. Hildred Geertz criticized both Thomas' bias and his approach in 1975, and was amongst the first to do so;<sup>9</sup> Barstow was able in the 1980s to criticize Thomas, but it is evident from her work and from other contemporary work that her allegations were read as an outright attack on sensibility. Her phraseology and her evident feeling of betrayal at Christina Lerner's hands (discussed below) open her to a canonical counter-attack: she is only using witchcraft studies to promote a radical and/or feminist campaign against received and established scholarship. Such a riposte would be standard in the past; only in the past decade has the study of magic emerged from Thomas' shadow. Religion and the Decline of Magic, like Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, is still termed a valuable resource, but it is no longer Gospel. Diane Purkiss notes that "Thomas and Macfarlane are taking their cue from changes in elite beliefs, despite their pathbreaking and painstaking examination of popular sources."<sup>10</sup> In addition,

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<sup>7</sup>Barstow 12.

<sup>8</sup>Barstow 8. Also cf. Thomas 437, 538.

<sup>9</sup>Hildred Geertz, "An Anthropology in Religion and Magic," Journal of Interdisciplinary History VI.1 (1975): 71-89.

<sup>10</sup>Purkiss 67.

Thomas, himself a product of the academic elite, brings this bias to his scholarship.<sup>11</sup> James Sharpe, though he does not mention Thomas by name, condemns the tendency to dismiss or categorise witchcraft and witch persecution as part of the barbarity of earlier times. The issue is not to ridicule those who do not “shar[e] the values which we have come to think of as important . . . [but] to explain how a wide variety of people, ranging from the very intelligent to the fairly stupid, were able to hold that belief.”<sup>12</sup> Sharpe spends much of the first part of his book exhorting the reader to accept that the mindset of witchcraft believers is as valid as today’s mindset. This emphasises that one must not condescend (as Thomas does) to past systems of belief if one is to study them most effectively.

This shift away from Thomas’ type of analysis is further underlined by Jonathan Barry. In introducing a volume of witchcraft essays, he is able to state without fearing roaring controversy that,

there remains a fundamental gap in Religion and the Decline of Magic's analysis of witchcraft. This can be summarised briefly as a lack of concern for the process of cultural transmission, compared to the intellectual plausibility and social/psychological usefulness of given ideas. There is no extended discussion, for example, of the role of education, the press, sermons, customary events or storytelling practices in the transmission of beliefs, nor of the impact that changes in or conflicts between these rival methods of transmission had on the survival, transformation or varied prestige and acceptance of these ideas. . . .the fascinating and crucial observation that, in many areas of early modern life, such as business, administration and the like, witchcraft beliefs were almost completely absent, is not followed up . . . this comment surely raises issues about the cultural contexts in which witchcraft, or magical ideas more broadly, might become part of the individual's way of understanding and those other areas of life where it would not.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>For just one example of many, he refers to the sixteenth- and seventeenth century English as “primitive peoples” (604).

<sup>12</sup> Sharpe 7.

<sup>13</sup>Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts, eds., Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 25.



This extract demonstrates the shift in "acceptable" critical attitudes. Irony lies in the fact that Barry is a student of Thomas, and therefore tacit canon approval is granted his critique. Care must be taken not to fall into the same pitfalls with Barry as with his tutor. For example, one must note that witchcraft does infiltrate domestic or farm business--most historical accusations take domestic failure, be it of harvest, produce, or children, as their catalyst (or excuse) for action. However, Barry's comment on storytelling practices is valid and can be extended to the texts under consideration in this study. Authors discourse with each other and with their culture. Barry's calm language belies the verbal and scholastic anxiety of his predecessors. Witchcraft studies have not outgrown, but have finally grown beyond Religion and the Decline of Magic.

The problematics of defending any one particular approach to early modern witches manifest themselves in the following citation from Karen Newman, in which she undermines the strength of some of her other arguments by stating, "Witches threatened hegemonic patriarchal structures precisely not through their bodies but through their representational powers: as cultural producers, as spectacle, as representatives. . .of an oppositional femininity."<sup>14</sup> Here we do not find a materfamilias pitted against a paterfamilias, but more generally women against men, Other against Self. Newman uses language which reflects that the crux of the matter lies in power struggles. Deborah Willis, in her book Malevolent Nurture, echoes Newman, speaking of the construction of witchcraft in terms of domination, rule, and demotion.<sup>15</sup> Domination, rule, demotion, threat, and opposition are all terms which depend on a pre-existing structure for their value.

Inevitably all historians and critics of witchcraft must combat patriarchy. Whether they operate within it or seek to free either themselves or their subject from

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<sup>14</sup>Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 69.

<sup>15</sup>Deborah Willis, Malevolent Nurture (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 15. See also the following discussion of Willis.

it, patriarchy informs and frames any discussion or debate. Hence Willis' witches become enmeshed and transformed from dominating mother figures to subordinated, servile drudges of the (powerful, male) Devil; Barstow notes that even Christina Lerner "turned away from the theory of persecution by gender, which she more than anyone had validated."<sup>16</sup> Lerner turns from gender to "more political" questions, and Barstow rightly observes that, "She [Lerner] doesn't make clear why one must forego questions about woman-hunting in order to work on the political issues, nor does she see that the woman-hunting questions *are* political. Material that shows women as 'threatening to patriarchal order' or religion as 'relentlessly patriarchal' is neither narrow nor apolitical."<sup>17</sup> As recently as the 1980s, therefore, the pressure of what can be termed a historical "canon" could and did deflect the aim of those who sought to include gender politics in their work--or even of those who thought to make it central. Barstow also notes a point which must inform any reading of Malevolent Nurture: "The patriarchal system also explains why many women accused other females: if a woman displeased or threatened the men of her community, she would also be seen as dangerous by the women who depended on or identified with those men."<sup>18</sup>

To concentrate on witchcraft as exclusively female in any field at any level is dangerous, especially since, as Gareth Roberts comments, one of the prime issues confronting "feminist historians of witchcraft, [is] that of male authors and authorities writing the predominantly female witch figure."<sup>19</sup> The witches who have survived in history and literature to the present day are necessarily therefore filtered through the male gaze. Inasmuch as they seek self-definition or expression, they must do so

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<sup>16</sup>Barstow 17. Cf. Christina Lerner, Enemies of God (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981).

<sup>17</sup>Barstow 17.

<sup>18</sup>Barstow 17-18.

<sup>19</sup>Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions," Barry et al. 185.



through men's writing and a male voice--what Elizabeth Harvey calls a ventriloquized voice.<sup>20</sup> This fact alone must alert one to male/female interplay and discourse.

Robin Briggs seems to be alert to these larger issues involved in witchcraft accusations. Briggs notes of the historical trials,

The whole process is best seen not as the deliberate criminalization of women, but as part of a much broader drive to exercise greater moral and social control by labelling and punishing many kinds of deviant behaviour. This process was often deeply unfair and hypocritical, but patriarchy in this sense meant first and foremost of the rich and powerful over the poor and weak.<sup>21</sup>

Briggs goes on to link women, vagrants, and beggars as social equals in this sense, or at least as co-habitants of patriarchy's dark margins. However, on the very next page, one finds the paragraph,

Gender did play a crucial role in witchcraft, but we will only understand this properly as part of the whole system, within which many other forces operated. What we need to explain is why women were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations, not why witchcraft was used as an excuse to attack women. To achieve this, we must be constantly aware of gender as one of the crucial polarities within the vital frontier zone where beliefs and accusations interacted. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Here Briggs recants, effectively dis-gendering patriarchy whilst hymning awareness of gender as an issue. The "whole system," patriarchy, is inherently male-oriented, male-dominated, and male-identified; if other forces operate, they are perforce subject to this central fact of definition. These two contrasting paragraphs demonstrate the subtle snags which twentieth-century critics encounter, even when aware of gender issues. For contemporary authors, these snags were not snags but fact--ways of life and social order.

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<sup>20</sup>Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices* (1992; London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>21</sup>Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours* (London: HarperCollins, 1996) 262. Briggs here specifically treats of infanticide (committed by the new mother), but the argument can be extended.

<sup>22</sup>Briggs 263.



Not that there were no Renaissance feminists: both Pamela Benson and Constance Jordan amply demonstrate that within the discourse on "the woman question" authors (self-acknowledged as both male and female, but still mostly male) champion women and femininity as necessary equals to men and masculinity.<sup>23</sup> This debate, of course, is direct heir of the medieval querelles and exchanges, such as the Querelle de la Rose and the exempla perpetuated by Boccaccio and his colleagues. One must also remember that such debates were not scholarly in the modern sense of the word. As much as a philosophy and history, the debate was a self-conscious literary form, in which in its later manifestations the same author could and did produce arguments for either side. Rhetoric and presentation were constructed as carefully as the arguments they set forth. Jonathan Barry, in his introduction to Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, echoes this observation in his critique of Thomas:

[Thomas] used his sources as statements of fact or feeling, not as examples of rhetoric or storytelling. Yet there are a number of reasons for thinking that any history of witchcraft . . . needs a more reflexive attitude to the nature of history and storytelling than Religion and the Decline of Magic displays. One reason is that the contemporary debate about witchcraft was itself so resolutely historical . . . and so much of our evidence has come down in the writings of such histories, whether scholarly studies or the popular trial narratives so often labelled the 'history' of a particular witch. . . . There was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no clearcut borderline between story and history . . . the more creative challenge, which historians are now taking up, is to explore the positive dimension of past evidence as storytelling, by considering the meaning of the story itself, and its significance in shaping the very history it is recording.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Pamela Joseph Benson, The Invention of the Renaissance Woman (University Park, PA: Penn. State UP, 1992); Constance Jordan, Renaissance Feminism (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990). Although contributing authors to the debate claimed to be both male and female, many scholars believe that at least some portion of the allegedly female-authored texts were written by men, often in response to or rebuttal of arguments they themselves put forward. Jordan agrees, noting that "[c]ontemporary voices, whether male or female, were generally male-identified" (224). Interestingly, Jordan does not discuss witchcraft at all.

<sup>24</sup>Barry 43.

History is constructed predominantly by literature, and discourse must be retained between the two fields. If literature does not actually manifest a society's self-expression and definition, then at the very least it reflects and mirrors them, and provides an arena in which societal (socio-political, sexual, historical) issues can be confronted and manipulated.

Benson notes in her introduction that whilst throughout the sixteenth century in England the literary/intellectual definition of woman was changing, both those who note and those who support the change on paper and in theory still demonstrate a "reluctance to initiate political reform."<sup>25</sup> That is, whereas the Renaissance feminists (or, as Benson terms them, profeminists) are committed to discussing and defending women, willingly ceding them manly qualities as had Boccaccio earlier, and admitting them as intellectual and spiritual equals, they are chary of even suggesting changes to social and political fabrics which might (and no doubt would) upset the patriarchal status quo. These authors and philosophers are overwhelmingly men or male-identified. Hence, Benson argues,

They use genre, characterization, comedy, contrasting levels of style, and other literary means to short-circuit the logical political consequences of their praise . . . in defending women in the particular ways they do, they defend their society and their own literary voices against new womankind. . . .The male remains the authoritative author of literary texts and the governor of social institutions.<sup>26</sup>

This short-circuit was still in effect in Ewen's time.

Benson believes that if patriarchy--"conventional opinion" as she terms it--is present within any given text, then change will not be forthcoming, even if the text allegedly supports radical opinions. As she states, "the presence of the voice of conventional opinion, even if only implied, is one factor in the inhibition of political consequences because it prevents the reader from aligning himself with the extreme

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<sup>25</sup>Benson 2.

<sup>26</sup>Benson 2.



position advocated by the authorial voice."<sup>27</sup> Benson distinguishes the reader as male, and does not question whether a female reader might have a different response. As Hull and others note, female readership was on the rise throughout the sixteenth century, and some women did contribute to the profeminist debate. The alarming implication of Benson's allegation is that a text, to truly advocate socio-political change, must completely divorce itself from known voices and modes of communication. Criticism can find an outlet, but, as it is a function of conventional opinion, it is safely contained and cannot threaten. This in and of itself makes the likelihood of that change minuscule, and argues for a reactionary, paranoid, and unassailable patristic and patriarchal society and literature. Simultaneously, it calls for a different voice, which clarion is picked up in modern feminist criticism.

One of the questions this study explores is whether or not Benson's attitude is applicable, especially to drama, where visual spectacle and verbal impact can be more violent and shocking than on the printed page. Newman believes spectacle to be an important point in any demonstration of or wish for change. Dramatic spectacles in particular allow or downright encourage witchcraft discourse:

Witches threatened hegemonic patriarchal structures precisely not through their bodies but through their representational powers: as cultural producers, as spectacle, as representatives . . . of an oppositional femininity. Witchcraft dramatized for its Elizabethan and Jacobean audience, if not for its contemporary readers as well, the spectacle of the production of subjectivity in both senses: the being subject to another and the becoming the subject of discourse.<sup>28</sup>

Marjorie Garber supports the converse of this argument. Patriarchal playwrights, by appropriating and controlling spectacle, distance and effectively control any threat the witch or unruly woman might pose:

Recent theorists have argued that apparently subversive gestures on the part of a text or a culture are actually moves by a dominant ideology to appropriate the activity of subversion and to contain it. Likewise,

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<sup>27</sup>Benson 3.

<sup>28</sup>Newman 69.

encounters with the other, through the gaze or visual spectacle, as well as through more institutionalized cultural interventions like marriage or colonization, establish a pattern of dominance and marginalization that is available for exploitation. Estrangement as a strategy--the identification of an other against which the self may be not only measured but defined and demarcated--is found over and over again in the works of English Renaissance authors.<sup>29</sup>

Modern critics find the domination of and by the (male) defining gaze quite familiar territory. Gaze is necessary both to define spectacle and to define what is perceived as "other." The Other teases, fascinates in the strict definition of the term, must be dealt with in some fashion lest imagination be seduced. Whether or not this fascination is a direct or indirect threat varies from author to author and audience to audience. The images retain their validity either way. What is usual in witchcraft texts, as well as in witchcraft accusations, is that the Other is perceived as socially and/or morally inferior, and therefore "lower." Peter Stallybrass and Allon White define the fascination thus:

Again and again we find a striking ambivalence to the representation of the lower strata (of the body, of literature, of place) in which they are both reviled and desired. Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing 'low' conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other.<sup>30</sup>

Political conflicts with personal or domestic. Linda Bamber posits further that the early modern Self in literature must be male, the Other female.<sup>31</sup> Bamber's stance is too simplistic; as stated above, in the texts to hand one must always be alert not just to male/female conflict, but to interplay and interweaving. Gender politics are not static and easily defined.

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<sup>29</sup>Marjorie Garber, ed., Introduction, Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) viii.

<sup>30</sup>Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986) 4-5.

<sup>31</sup>Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1982) 4 and passim.



Scholars agree conflict exists in witchcraft texts. Often they agree that due to their marginality, witches and viragos are caught in the crux between two larger, or at least clearer issues. But the poles of debate change--not just because of new evidence, but because of shifts in the concerns of modern-day critics. Until recently, (and again, due to the influence of Thomas and Macfarlane), general opinion held that English witches were completely separate from Continental witches, in manner, concern, and trial. Ankarloo and Henningsen, however, point out that this is not the case: "Most of what has so far been identified as peculiar to English witchcraft should from now on be considered as characteristic for large parts of northern Europe . . . [where in] many lower-court trials . . . the accused were simply tried for maleficium and not asked demonological questions by their local judges."<sup>32</sup> Whereas before occult scholarship manifested in overwhelmingly Anglo-American ways, recently academia has become more receptive to other ethnic studies (as it has to gender studies). Robert Muchembled exemplifies the turning-point in recent attitudes to deciphering the witch-figure. He posits a conflict between high and low (learned and domestic) culture, but introduces an element which others before him do not emphasise. "[W]omen are the exact equivalent," states Muchembled, "in their own culture, of demonologists and judges in theirs. They bring up children, but in a very different way from that in which the theologians and magistrates seek to educate the people."<sup>33</sup>

Muchembled relocates the conflict between men and women into control of the thought-patterns of ensuing generations--namely, to maternity, its duties, and its effects. Publishing within a year of Muchembled, Newman starts to develop this theory. Based on the images of witch-hunting techniques of finding the devil's teat on a witch (by which she suckled her familiar(s) on her blood), and pricking marks,

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<sup>32</sup>Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., Early Modern European Witchcraft (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 1-2.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Muchembled, "Satanic Myths and Cultural Reality," Ankarloo and Henningsen 150-51.



particularly on the genitals, to find insensitive areas which also proved the witch's demonic pact, Newman posits that, more than just inverted or perverted female sexuality, "In early modern England, witchcraft represented an inversion of maternal relations of the maternal body, and finally, the powerful ambivalence of the mother's body in its double capacity as sexual object and nurturing mother."<sup>34</sup> Men control most of early modern society and its manifestations; however, physical motherhood, (as opposed to literary or ideological representations of motherhood), is the one area where men have no power. All depends upon and is nourished by the female body. In a patriarchal society, the mother represents the threat and/or ambition of the "second-in-command." By nominally narrowing the field of witchcraft analysis from the general "woman" to the more specific mother, critics such as Newman actually engage with more power anxieties than previously. By extension, control of the perceptions of motherhood becomes more important, and in many of the texts under review in this study authors manipulate the image of the mother.

Deborah Willis furthers and develops Newman's postulate. Willis believes that the class and gender of the authors of various treatises and texts influenced the treatment and portrayal that the witch received. At the village level, the accusations were generational wars, initiated by "women past childbearing years who used their mothering powers against neighbours who had enraged them."<sup>35</sup> These neighbours, states Willis, were often younger mothers. Willis in her picture portrays a matristic locus for witchcraft within the larger social (patriarchal) order. The further one gets from the village disputes (and distance from village social life usually corresponds directly with distance up the hierarchical structure), female power is devalued and removed:

In gentry-level and aristocratic texts . . . [t]he witch loses some but not all associations with the malevolent mother; she is featured, rather, as

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<sup>34</sup>Newman 58.

<sup>35</sup>Willis ix.

an enemy of God and a rebel against the state, and her crime is betrayal rather than magical harm. In the process she is also demoted; whereas in village-level discourse the witch is almost always a dominating mother who controls childlike demonic imps, in elite discourse--influenced by Calvinist doctrine and continental theories of the demonic pact--she is subordinated to a diabolic male "master," becoming the servant or "drudge" of a devil now represented not as a child but as an adult male endowed with frightening powers, a rival of God and the godly fathers who rule in his name. The image of the envied maternal breast is replaced with that of the female body "open" to diabolic influence; Satan rules both the witch and her "imps." Imagined in terms of the mother-child dyad at the village level, the witch in elite discourse is often reconfigured in terms of a perverse but patriarchal family.<sup>36</sup>

Diane Purkiss attempts to synthesize a witch-figure. Her witches are both belligerently and inherently female, often maternal, and almost always opposed to patriarchal literature and interpretation. However, her hard-hitting, sometimes biting analysis softens when she turns to examine her texts. And whereas her witches resist a patriarchal literature and interpretation, readers remain uncertain whether their resistance is to early modern, or twentieth-century, patriarchy.

Where Willis's argument fails, it does so because she does not take into account adequately the importance of the female tongue and female voice. Often possession of these two unruly elements was enough to make a woman "guilty" of witchcraft. Stuart Clark barely mentions women in his recent book Thinking with Demons, but does mention "the close links between shrewishness, scolding, and witchcraft in depictions of the 'overthwart' female in early modern Europe."<sup>37</sup> Here the definition of a witch broadens to include not just those women who were believed to hold occult power, but those who held, or attempted to hold, any sort of power at all.

The female voice is inextricably bound in Renaissance texts with her sexuality, further complicating the issue. "Examined within the discourses of the

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<sup>36</sup>Willis 15.

<sup>37</sup>Stuart Clark, Thinking with Demons (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 106-07.



period," observes Harvey, "women's voice or tongue . . . is seen to be imbricated with female sexuality, just as silence is 'bound up' with sexual continence."<sup>38</sup> Power of speech is active (and therefore threatening) sexuality, the threat being directly against that structure which seeks to bind women to its will. There are few, if any, silent witches. Here Lisa Jardine notes a unique literary trait: "In literature, from folk-tale to romance, shrews are always women, though philologically they may properly be male, and they exercise a bewitching effect on the men who are subjected to their tongue's [sic] lash."<sup>39</sup> In literature, there is no mode of speech which is transgressive for men, since they are seen to control speech. Conversely, men are extraordinarily subject to women's speech, should women be mannish enough to find it. Controlling a woman's tongue controls both her fascinating verbal effect and her dangerous sexuality. Harvey also marks men's fear of "a contaminated sexuality, an ability to reproduce without sex, or, conversely, an adulterated sexuality that is barren. The monstrousness of this vision is akin to ventriloquism (which is, after all, one of the symptoms of demonic possession or witchcraft)."<sup>40</sup> Reproducing without sex harks back to the witch nursing her demonic familiars, children she needed no men to conceive and whom she can transmit by the power of her breath. Ironically, this vision, reprehensible in women and witches, was the main goal in alchemy, a predominantly, though not entirely, male art. Alchemists aimed to produce a homunculus, a "little man" born of spirit alone, free from the taint of woman. This goal was laudable, not monstrous. The ventriloquism in the above citation is a type of speaking in tongues, or an expression of the subconscious in actual form. Ironically, it can also apply to all of the texts under discussion, for if men are engaging in ventriloquism by writing witches and women, then they, too, are guilty of witchcraft.

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<sup>38</sup>Harvey 4.

<sup>39</sup>Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters (Sussex: Harvester, 1983) 103.

<sup>40</sup>Harvey 11.

For men, one method of controlling women's voices and sexuality lies in severing or combining both of the fearful female orifices. This often results in grotesque imagery which, especially for the male gaze, does not have any kind of redeeming, Rabelaisian laughter. Hideous deformed hags vomit forth horrific children who devour in their turn; mothers kiss and devour their sons with both mouths; witches pass on their familiars by oral intercourse. Even court women are demoted to being no more than a tongue. Newman mentions "a rhetorical disciplining of the female body by fragmenting it. . . .Anatomization was a strategy for managing femininity and controlling its uses."<sup>41</sup> Fragmentation extends not only to women, but to their portrayals. For women, when fragmented into body parts, are also fragmented into stereotypes--whore, witch, scold, and so forth. Most of these pictures are framed by the way in which mouths are used, be it to curse, devour, render impotent, or any other sexual empowerment (and therefore deviance).

But for real women as well as written women, silence and its sexual counterpart, continence, can be just as damning. This too is linked to the unpredictability of the mouth. Silence can breed rebellion. Newman notes that,

The fragmentation of the female body into parts, and particularly the obsession with the female mouth, is not always focused literally on the genitals only but on the mouth as a source of speech as well . . . women's two mouths are conflated; disallowed speech is a sign throughout the period of sexual transgression.<sup>42</sup>

The irony here is obvious. Speech is a transgression; silence is a transgression. Lack of female speech implies that if a woman were to speak she would not blend in with (received, male, heterosexual) society. The potential of silence is as frightening as the actuality of speech. Every virgin can hide a virago; what man knows what word may transform a wife into a witch. The realisation of verbal potential--or sexual potential/appetite in speech--is what turns a Susan into a Margaret of Anjou. In Ester

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<sup>41</sup>Newman 10.

<sup>42</sup>Newman 11.

Hath Hang'd Haman, the author assigns power of speech to man, and claims it to be women's downfall. "[O]athes" and a "flattering tongue" prove man the descendant of the serpent in Eden rather than Adam. If women accept and surrender themselves to this "lewd counsell," then

. . . they nothing shall want,  
 But for to be honest, then all things are scant.  
 It proves a bad nature in men doth remaine.  
 To make women lewd their purses they straine.  
 For a woman that's honest they care not a whit,  
 Theyle say she is honest because she lacks wit.<sup>43</sup>

This excerpt, in addition to expanding the speech/sexuality argument to men, demonstrates another dilemma for women. In male perceptions, the poem implies, sexual activity is equivalent to intelligence. An honest, sexually continent woman is a dull and stupid one who "lacks wit." Wit/intelligence, especially for women, is therefore a male construct, its primary requisites being deference to the male tongue and submission to male desires. All of these dual binds inform, and must inform, any study of what Kate Chedgzoy terms "the symbolic centrality of fantasies of female power in a culture which hedged about the agency of actual women with innumerable restrictions."<sup>44</sup>

Being a witch involves not only occult or speech practices, but any kind of transgressive behaviour. Usually this behaviour renders the woman liminal, or even more marginal than she was previously. Though men may be included in some plays, in most witchcraft texts it is mainly women who are marginalised, and who threaten boundaries and structures by not only their marginalisation but also their powers of speech, whether this manifests itself in shrewdness, spells, scolding, or cursing.

The witch is therefore the epitome of the unruly or disorderly woman. Woman's disorderliness, argues Natalie Zemon Davis, "led her into the evil arts of witchcraft, so ecclesiastical authorities claimed; and when she was embarked upon

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<sup>43</sup>Sowernam H1v.

<sup>44</sup>Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill, eds., Voicing Women (Keele: Keele UP, 1996) 8.



some behavior for which her allegedly weak intellect disqualified her, such as theological speculation or preaching, that was blamed on her disorderliness, too."<sup>45</sup> Witchcraft is here connected with women's thought, or specifically spiritual exercise. This reflects the problematics of the Renaissance feminists, who maintained women's spiritual equality. Constance Jordan refines Benson's claim that no change is possible thus: "[T]heir [women's] common standing in the faith did not affect the political order. All the more remarkable, therefore, were the many claims to equality posed by feminist writers. The kinds of equality at issue vary, but the crucial point to notice . . . is the extent to which woman's spiritual equality is seen to entail a correlative political status."<sup>46</sup> This correlative political status remains theoretical, however. Stevie Davies bluntly resolves the issue, noting that "A familiar expression on the Renaissance face is one of duplicity. Its Janus temperament sees with dual vision and maintains a vehemently self-contradictory set of opinions." As part of a series of illustrations, Davies offers, "The pagan goddesses are all lies and humbug; on the contrary, they allegorise deep truths. Woman is a bane and a fool, and a scold; she is the highest being we can know or imagine. She is the alienated Other; she is . . . our truest self."<sup>47</sup> Dialectic and alterity are therefore as necessary to Renaissance thought and to the maintenance of "traditional" Renaissance intellectual hierarchies as the discourse about alterity is to stimulate new thought. Any image or figure of otherness must be multi-faceted and serve varying purposes.

Benson, in her argument that nothing subject to patriarchy or the patriarchal voice (or, as implied, the patriarchal gaze) can actively change or challenge the prevailing order, supports what Davis implies is "old-school" thought, especially anthropological thought: that sexual inversion or unruly women "can renew the

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<sup>45</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (London: Duckworth, 1975) 125.

<sup>46</sup>Jordan 5.

<sup>47</sup>Stevie Davies, The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature (Brighton: Harvester, 1986) 26-27.

system, but they cannot change it."<sup>48</sup> Davies and more especially Jordan endorse or elaborate upon what Davis was one of the first to argue:

[T]he disorderly woman did not always function to keep women in their place. On the contrary, it was a multivalent image that could operate, first, to widen behavioral options for women . . . and second, to sanction riot and political disobedience for both men and women. . . . Play with the unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power in society. The woman-on-top might even facilitate innovation in historical theory and political behavior.<sup>49</sup>

This study explores Davis' multivalency, and plays with the perception of that same image. The interplay between worth or significance and the perceptions thereof changes over time and to some extent genre. Within Elizabethan literature, for example, one finds that although Spenser's and Lyly's hags and witches are portrayed strikingly, each author, in his quest for a golden-age happy ending, privileges a consolatory "happy ever after" at the expense of dramatic tension and in some cases realism. Spenser's exception is the problematic Britomart, who is never fully reconciled to working within her designated patriarchal role(s). Lyly's Mother Bombie retains a Sibylline quality which distances her from the people she "serves." The history plays, including Macbeth and The Witch of Edmonton, each based on historical personages at varying temporal distances, charge their images differently. Despite the alleged happy endings, audiences necessarily come away with a sense of unease, and this sense is largely the result of unruly women. At issue then is the extent to which these women's inspiration of unease provokes thought and allows for the facilitation of change which Davis supports. What is not evident from the witchcraft texts, however, is direct and specific support of Benson's thesis. Davis succinctly observes that,

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<sup>48</sup>Davis 131.

<sup>49</sup>Davis 131.

the proposed remedies for female unruliness . . . [were] Religious training that fashioned the reins of modesty and humility; selective education that showed a woman her moral duty without enflaming her undisciplined imagination or loosing her tongue for public talk; honest work that busied her hands; and laws and constraints that made her subject to her husband.<sup>50</sup>

Within the texts here studied, these remedies are rarely applied or suggested entirely successfully. Occasionally, they are subverted.<sup>51</sup> However, the lack of such remedies may stimulate a sense of horror, especially if either the narrator or the implied audience is male.

Though Davis's book discusses early modern France, the essay from which citations are here drawn, "Women on Top," is much more general. In her first sentence, "The female sex was thought the disorderly one par excellence in early modern Europe," Davis explodes the boundary of her essay and indeed discusses England frequently.<sup>52</sup> Stuart Clark in "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft" picks up Davis's thread of the disorderly or societally disobedient woman and links it specifically with witchcraft.<sup>53</sup> He argues that "Renaissance descriptions of the nature of Satan, the character of hell and, above all, the ritual activities of witches shared a vocabulary of misrule, that they were in effect part of a language conventionally employed to establish and condemn the properties of a disorderly world."<sup>54</sup>

Clark's thesis contains a number of points, and raises a number of questions, especially when coupled with the statement, ". . . even if they shared no specific types of inversion, both festive behaviour and learned demonology were dependent on inversion itself as a formal principle. And this allows us to apply to witchcraft studies

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<sup>50</sup>Davis 126.

<sup>51</sup>See especially chapter 10.

<sup>52</sup>Davis 124, passim.

<sup>53</sup>Past and Present 87 (1980): 98-127.

<sup>54</sup>Clark "Inversion" 100.



some of the questions being asked by historians and anthropologists about the meaning of misrule."<sup>55</sup> He is concerned mainly with perceptions of witchcraft and unruly women. He sides with Benson on the question of convention, claiming that the disobedient woman is in fact part of the nature and expression of obedience. But the key issues are expressed in the verb "establish" and the phrase "inversion as a formal principle." Misrule and unruliness are used to define not only themselves but the world around them. If they do so, they must at once render such a world disorderly and cause it to be perceived as such. And if this is the case, and they are part of a "conventional" language, then disorder itself must be the convention, and inversion a commonplace. Images then lose the sense of the unheimlich which they must hold to serve any sort of purpose, and also lose the very valency, to go back to Davis' term, which Clark says they hold. This holds true with a goodly amount of Clark's article. Anything which does not fit in with the perceived order of hierarchy is inversion. As exceptions are always found--and, indeed, it seems from Clark's portrayal that society is mainly exceptions--how can the definition of inversion maintain its validity? Such generality does support Clark's argument that "Inversion in whatever context was thus necessarily a political act," but the necessity arises from a world in which nothing is ever upright, and in which order must be seen to be threatening, as it is the new and the unaccustomed.<sup>56</sup>

The other point raised in Clark is that of language. Willis echoes him, noting, "representations of the witch in early modern literary and dramatic texts often did register male anxieties about female unruliness or sexual power, and the language of witchcraft could be used to denigrate or otherwise discourage a variety of female behaviors." <sup>57</sup> But Willis never discusses this "language of witchcraft," which Clark claims is "conventional." Clark discounts this language, as he does the gender issue,

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<sup>55</sup>Clark "Inversion" 102.

<sup>56</sup>Clark "Inversion" 111.

<sup>57</sup>Willis 9.

in his later work, noting offhandedly that "shrews, scolds, viragos, and the rest were all demonic, of course."<sup>58</sup> He demonstrates in this retrenching a backlash akin to that experienced by Barstow—a return to Thomas' privileges. Clark directly equates witchcraft with demonology.<sup>59</sup> In his late work witchcraft is merely one of many disorders and "another obvious example of female deviance" and inversion.<sup>60</sup> By making women demonic, Clark relegates them to the sphere of those who defined and debated demonology, all of whom were learned men.<sup>61</sup> But Clark's backlash attitude is not typical of current studies. In contrast to Clark, Sharpe states, "one recurring element in the patterned responses remains of fundamental importance: powers of malefic witchcraft were overwhelmingly ascribed to women."<sup>62</sup>

The definition of the language of witchcraft must be crucial, rooted as it is in speech, tongue, voice, and control thereof. Marcia McGowan and Sandra Boschetto-Sandoval write, "If oppressed groups must be able to speak in many codes, and if no single discourse will be sufficient to their revolutionary situation, then normal categories of literary definition and genre must. . .finally beg for new definitions and dialectic articulation."<sup>63</sup> Magical language is often highly ritualistic and encoded, presenting difficulties for and raising unease in the audience. But is the language of witchcraft merely that language used in the magical praxeis? The language used to describe by various contemporary scholars and commentators to describe witches and their practices? The language used to form their image, like Spenser's, Lyly's,

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<sup>58</sup>Clark Demons 132.

<sup>59</sup> Clark Demons 82.

<sup>60</sup> Clark Demons 132.

<sup>61</sup> See "A Disturbance of Imagination" for further discussion of this point.

<sup>62</sup> Sharpe 168. Sharpe does discuss possession, a topic dear to Clark, but believes it is "an alternative model" (190). By discounting gender as an issue of "fundamental importance," to the extent that he largely ignores it, Clark places himself outside the discussion of this study.

<sup>63</sup>Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval and Marcia Phillips McGowan, eds., Claribel Alegria and Central American Literature (Athens, OH: Ohio U Center for International Studies, 1994) xxii.

Shakespeare's, Middleton's, Dekker's? Scot and Dekker at least recognized the real historical tendency to scapegoat the marginal, rendering them an oppressed group. But the discourse which reaches us as readers is ventriloquized, for the major exponents of it are male. One is left with the task of unraveling many layers of voice, without devaluing them, in order to discover if there is any sort of whole, coherent depiction. As for new definitions, these must be self-definitions created not by exterior male forces, but by witches and viragos themselves. The degree to which an active assumption of such self-definition succeeds varies in the texts in this study, as does the degree of self-awareness of the women themselves.

Adding to this Babel of voices comes a warning from Chedgzoy:

in taking it upon ourselves to speak for the other woman, we run the risk of silencing her or appropriating her voice to serve our own ends. . . . Our voices as critics are fashioned in dialogue with each other, with the academy at large, and with the men and women we write about, and the sexual politics of our own speaking becomes intelligible within an overdetermined intellectual and institutional matrix.<sup>64</sup>

"The other woman" in this context can be read as the Other/woman. Chedgzoy and her contributors believe that recognition of this problem may start the unraveling process. In this light, and in the light of Newman's observation that "the practice of witchcraft is a semiotic activity that depends on acts of reading, systems of differences,"<sup>65</sup> criticism itself is a transgressive activity akin to, if not the same as, witchcraft. It is prone to the same dialectics, forces, politics. In this sense, some of the feminist witchcraft debate of the 1970s can apply to all witchcraft studies. Bovenschen writes, *"In the image of the witch, elements of the past and of myth oscillate, but along with them, elements of a real and present dilemma as well. In the surviving myth, nature and fleeting history are preserved.* In turning to an historical

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<sup>64</sup>Chedgzoy 8.

<sup>65</sup>Newman 66.



image, women do not address the historical phenomenon but rather its symbolic potential."<sup>66</sup>

The figure of the witch, sign and signified, is caught and trapped between varying discourses. Each discourse agrees she is liminal. The differences lie in trying to define which boundaries are transgressed, revalued, or lost. These differences vary widely, especially within the bounds of theatrical representation. Purkiss observes that relatively few witchcraft plays were produced in comparison with other genres such as romance. One of the reasons for this lies in politics which, in the time of Elizabeth I, effectively were gender politics. Though it is not the purpose of this study to analyse the various aspects of Elizabethan power plays and cults of the queen, one must acknowledge that influence. Purkiss links the various Elizabethan problematics directly with the paucity of witchcraft plays of that period:

The pressure exerted by Elizabeth on a masculine identity so fragile that it was unable to tolerate the equation of power with femininity in any sphere made the witch more of a problem, and perhaps more of a threat. Taken together with the politicisation of the figure in relation to the queen, it is not surprising that few were game enough to portray witches and sorceresses.<sup>67</sup>

The witch is definitely both problem and threat—a concern evidenced not just in theatre but in Spenser and in the contemporary witchcraft sources, as the following chapter shows. This concern with male and female identity and the power which does or “should” belong to men and women, contested over the locus of the witch, is carried over into Jacobean witchcraft plays as well. We see, especially in The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton, that these authors are “game” enough to engage with the problem and link witchcraft and the perception of witchcraft with politics. Whatever the relative paucity of witchcraft plays, a rich enough legacy exists to make study fruitful, however; and both within those plays “normally” considered witchcraft texts and without can be found a wealth of varying witch figures. Many of these can be

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<sup>66</sup>Bovenschen 87, her emphasis.

<sup>67</sup>Purkiss 186.

identified as witches only by their transgressive behaviour; some have not been recognised as such before. Yet encoded in their actions or portrayal are some or all of the aspects of the witch as unruly woman or vice versa.

Purkiss believes that the theatre does not encapsulate or contribute to the witchcraft discourse(s) as much as it capitalises upon them. She claims that each witch is a synthesis of whatever comes to the playwright's hand, as the following excerpt shows:

In using magic and witchcraft as tropes for itself, the theatre was invoking its own peculiarly idiosyncratic figurations of the witch, rather than referring to the authoritative discourses then in circulation about her. Apparently unmoved by legal, medical, ecclesiastical, theological, demonological and even royal discourses, the theatre's witches remained uninflected by the sometimes stupendous power struggles centring on the figure of the witch. Nor was the stage sticking resolutely to a popular cultural understanding of the witch; it would be generous to the point of being misleading to imply that the witch's chief dramatic architects had much idea of popular belief structures. Plays do not reflect any single discourse of witchcraft, but instead manufacture not one but many literary witches of their own that have only tangential relation to the figures in other people's texts, much less the figures on the scaffold at Tyburn.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas it is true that none of the witch figures, not even Mother Sawyer, step unadulterated from the pages of contemporary sources onto the stage, accepting Purkiss' judgment purely at face value defeats and devalues analysis or criticism itself, as surely as giving in to the mellifluous cacophony of witchcraft commentary. Purkiss herself must realise this, or there remains no purpose to the second half of her book, which concerns itself with textual analysis. Whereas it may be more difficult than feminists hope, perhaps nearly impossible, to retrieve the very self of the early modern witch, it is not to say that images and depictions of her are invalid as signifiers of or commentary upon early modern anxieties and beliefs.

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<sup>68</sup>Purkiss 182.

Any study must necessarily create boundaries of its own in choosing the texts it wishes to discuss. Neglecting either Spenser, whose The Faerie Queene offers more instances of more kinds of witches than any other single text, or Shakespeare, whose works are riddled with witches of various types, would be leaving a glaring hole in the study. Because I have chosen to look at a number of Shakespeare's less well-discussed plays, and also chosen to emphasise other lesser-known plays such as The Witch, Mother Bombie and the neglected The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon, I have been unable to include such texts as The Masque of Queens and Sophonisba. This represents neither a dislike of these texts nor a judgment upon them, but merely a limit to the extent of this study. The literary representations of the witch are adequately demonstrated in the texts to hand.

As Willis, Purkiss, and to some extent Clark observe, the witch is in many ways caught between high and low discourse. In addition, the many voices of criticism demonstrate that the witch is also caught between several critical discourses. This study posits that the witch herself is a hybrid representation. Her hybridity is multiform and can derive as much from the twentieth century as from the sixteenth and seventeenth. The very anxieties she generates argue for her centrality, though this centrality paradoxically is comprised of a vehement liminality which resists enclosure.

There are types which serve as tropes for witches—kinds of women which occur frequently, not just in theory but in the texts and treatises of the period. The shrew, the scold, the hag, the witch, the woman who dares to claim her sexuality, the woman who dares to speak or act out, the cunning woman, the wise-woman, and the witch who derives from Greco-Roman mythology—all of these are present in some



way in the texts under discussion (though not all simultaneously). The next chapter demonstrates that these differing examples come not just from theoretical and critical investigation of literary types but from contemporary sources on the nature of witches and of women. The rest of the study analyses how various authors develop their witches and their women from these starting-points, starting with The Faerie Queene, whose portrayal of witches is so wide and varied that it serves as a reservoir of the varying kinds of witches and woman on display in late Tudor and early Stuart texts.

CHAPTER 1. A DISTURBANCE OF IMAGINATION—CONTEMPORARY ANALYTICAL SOURCES

*[W]hereas women having a mervellous fickle nature, what greefe so ever happeneth unto them, immediatlie all pecablenes of mind departeth; and they are so troubled with evill humors, that outgo their venomous exhalations, ingendered thorough their ilfavoured diet, and increased by meanes of their pernicious excrements, which they expell. . . .*

*And if it were true, honest women maie be witches, in despight of all inquisitors: neither can anie avoid being a witch, except shee locke her selfe up in a chamber.*

*Citation of Vairus and discussion in The Discoverie of Witchcraft<sup>1</sup>*

The germs of the portrayals of the witches and women which will be examined in the body of this study are found in the learned literature of the late medieval and early modern periods. Though authors such as Johann Wier, Reginald Scot, and George Gifford express scepticism on the subject of witchcraft, and some deny (or are at least perceived to deny) the existence of witchcraft itself, these authors both are subject to and subtly express the prevalent opinions and anxieties about women. Whilst constructing arguments meant to dissuade the rational from the sorts of persecutions outlined in the witch trial pamphlets, witchcraft authors perpetuate the links between women's words and witchcraft, and between sex, sexuality and witchcraft which permeate the texts under study. The pamphlets themselves, written as they are by men, are usually *reportage*, sometimes no more than lists of evidence, and rarely a record of the accused's actual words. Thus the pamphlets can become not just a record of local anxieties and rivalries grown out of control, but a constructed narrative lauding the (male) narrator and his cohorts. For example, the "Dedicatorie" of The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster sets up "above

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<sup>1</sup> The Discoverie of Witchcraft by Reginald Scot: with an Introduction by the Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1972) 158.

all things to be remembered, the excellent care of these Iudges in the Triall of offendours.”<sup>2</sup>

The brightest luminaries in the witchcraft debate are Johann Wier (or Weyer) and Reginald Scot. Satellite to them are George Gifford and other scholars or philosophers who contributed to the debate on witchcraft by fuelling the debate on women. James VI and I, at least late in the sixteenth century and at the beginning of his English reign, was virulently anti-sceptic and wrote his Daemonologie, in forme of a Dialogue specifically to counteract and condemn the works of Scot and Wier.

James’s aim is to

resolue the doubting harts of many, both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the instrumentes thereof, merits most seuerly to be punished: against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, wherof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft: and so mainteines the olde error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. The other called VVIERUS, a German Phisition, sets out a publike apologie for al these craftes-folkes, whereby, procuring for their impunitie, he plainlie bewrayes himselfe to have bene one of that profession.<sup>3</sup>

Wier was and is held to be a fearsome authority. Jacques Grévin, when speaking of sorcery and devils in 1567, states, “[I]l me souvient que Iehan Vvier, medecin du Duc de Cleves en auoit ramassé tout ce qui s’en pouvait dire, et l’auoit tellement examiné

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Potts, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster (London, 1613) N.p. or folio mark.

<sup>3</sup> James VI and I, Daemonologie, in forme of a Dialogue, Edinburgh 1597, Minor Prose Works of King James VI and I, ed. James Craigie (Edinburgh: Scottish Text society, 1982) xix. All references to this edition. James’s opinion demonstrates that even if Scot believed himself merely to be denying agency to witches, he was perceived to be denying the existence of witches themselves. James Sharpe doesn’t directly claim Scot is an atheist, but states, “In effect (and despite his disavowals), the logic of Scot’s arguments led to a denial of the reality of the spirit world as surely as it did to a denial of the reality of witchcraft.” Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996) 55.



selon la reigle de nostre Religion Chrestienne. . . .”<sup>4</sup> Freud believed that Wier’s De Praestigiis Daemonum was one of the ten most important books of all time.<sup>5</sup>

Grévin’s comment demonstrates that Wier for the most part escaped the disapproval his mentor earned during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Wier was apprenticed to Henry Cornelius Agrippa, a man who wrote the treatise De Occulta Philosophia fairly early in his career, but recanted the beliefs therein later.<sup>7</sup> As E.T. Withington points out, “[I]t was from the medical profession that the first determined opposition came . . . it was the physician Cornelius Agrippa who first successfully defended a witch at the risk of his own life, and it was his pupil John Weyer who first declared open war against the witch-hunters and invoked the vengeance of heaven upon their atrocities.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, Agrippa can be considered among the first feminists, or proto-feminists (to hark back to Newman’s term). First published in 1509, his De Praecellencia et Nobilitate Foemenei Sexei is a landmark in the debate about women’s nature. He argues for equality before God, and a moral edge for women in earthly matters:

Hence ‘tis evident, that as to the essence of the soul between Man and Woman, there can no Pre-eminence at all be challenged on either side. but [sic] the *same* innate worth and dignity of both, the Image of their creator being stampd as fairly, and shining as brightly in one, as t’other;

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes Wierus, De Praestigiis Daemonum gallice reddita a Jakoba Grevin, Cinq livres de l’imposture et tromperie des diables (N.p., 1567) ii.

<sup>5</sup> George Mora, ed. and John Shea, trans. , Witches, Devils and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De Praestigiis Daemonum (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991) xxvii.

<sup>6</sup> There are exceptions, especially in England; Henry Holland, for example, groups both Agrippa and Wier with Nero and Julian the Apostate and discounts them, stating, “Their experience, to say no more, was vnsufficient, most wicked and detestable.” A Treatise Against Witchcraft (Cambridge, 1590) A3r.

<sup>7</sup> I was unable to obtain a copy of this work; the BL had only a translation of the De Praecellencia, discussed below.

<sup>8</sup> E.T. Withington, “Dr. John Weyer and the Witch Mania,” Studies in the History and Method of Science, ed. Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1917) 214. This raises an interesting point when compared with those who believe that witches were in the main healers who were hounded out of existence by an increasingly male-dominated and regulated profession.

whereas in all other respects the *noble* and *delicate* Feminine Race, doth almost to infinity excell that *rough-hewn, boisterous* kind, the Male.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, he recognises the dilemma posed by Ester Sowernam in the previous chapter (that in the world at large, women will be damned whether or not they act chastely). In unhappy or unsatisfactory marriages, especially in those marriages in which the wife is unfaithful, Agrippa voices the opinion that the fault is usually on the male side: “[S]carce ever do *ill Wives* happen to any but *bad Husbands*, and such as by their own vitious Examples *debauch* them, and teach them to be wicked by a *President*.”<sup>10</sup> This statement is of interest for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that Agrippa agrees with, or at least panders to, the prevailing societal dictate that the husband must teach the wife (and that the wife must learn only from her husband and take his word, as the word of the head of the household, as gospel). Secondly, underlying this statement is perhaps an in-built, unconscious belief that women’s intellect is most appropriate when seconded to men’s. However, far from alleging that it is women’s speech that denotes their sexuality, Agrippa notes that overweening sexuality corrupts by example; he implies that if men follow the lusts their baser nature dictates, they will persuade their partners to do likewise: “[A] *lascivious Husband* will make a *wanton Wife*. . . .”<sup>11</sup> Though he falls short of discussing the double sexual standard, it could be argued that he is one of the first to recognise it in open debate.

Agrippa also supports and to some extent subverts beliefs which recur in witchcraft texts and which express contemporary views about women. In Mother

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Care, trans. Female Pre-eminence: or the Dignity and Excellency of that Sex, above the Male (London, 1670), introd. Diane Bornstein, The Feminist Controversy of the Renaissance (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1980) B1v. All references to this edition. All italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Care 48.

<sup>11</sup> Care 48.



Bombie, Dromio plays with the idea of women's inconstancy or simplicity making their children into fools (see chapter 10). Agrippa argues for the mother's character forming the child's almost in entirety:

[C]hildren *resemble* their Mothers many times in external features, but almost always in *Genius* and *Inclinations*; for where Mothers be *simple*, the Children generally prove *Fools*, and where they are *wise* these are *witty* . . . the *wisest Fathers* have most times *Idiots* to their Sons, and foolish Fathers get wise Children, provided the Mother be but possess of a competent stock of discretion.<sup>12</sup>

This passage challenges and threatens. As discussed in the introduction, male anxieties about the maternal power surface frequently in witchcraft texts. Here Agrippa all but states that men have little to no influence over the nature of their children. Most threatening is the phrase, “the *wisest Fathers* have most times *Idiots* to their Sons,” for it threatens the line of patrimony. The fact that Agrippa admits that there are simple women (a carry-over from the sort of thought noted in the “ill Wives” extract) does little to palliate Agrippa's implied audience of learned men whom the other statements threaten.

The De Praecellentia does treat briefly of witchcraft, and Agrippa's views echo those of later philosophers like Dee who believe true magic belongs only to a learned male tradition. He admits that, “In *Magick*, or the inexpugnable Discipline of good or ill Spirits (which many *talk of*, most *condemn*, and few *understand*,) *Circe* and *Medea*, wrought more wonders than *Zoroastes* himself, though most believe him the first inventor of these *black Arts*.”<sup>13</sup> However, in his eagerness to exempt women from the faults of witchcraft, he places magic incidentally into a male sphere: “[M]en

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<sup>12</sup> Care 23.

<sup>13</sup> Care 58. We can see in this extract an Agrippa who knows his knowledge of the arcana to be above the common pale, but one who is now willing to refer to “black” arts. The prevalence of Circe and Medea as Renaissance templates of successful enchanters is discussed elsewhere.



they were that *first* establish a commerce with the Regions of darkness, by treating and making compacts with infernal *spirits*, and inventing prophane Arts.”<sup>14</sup> This curious phrasing lauds male intellect whilst at the same time condemning it.

Like Agrippa, Wier defended those accused of witchcraft: Mora and Shea note, “Practically, he worked with both his first and second wife in attempting to help some of the people accused of witchcraft.”<sup>15</sup> The De Praestigiis is a monumental work which carefully goes through each type of magic and analyses both the practise thereof and the psychological effects upon the practitioners and believers. Unlike Agrippa, however, he takes a more clinical approach, and, as Mora and Shea observe, “What is clear in Weyer’s book is that intrinsic to the phenomenon of witchcraft is a disturbance of the imagination.”<sup>16</sup> However, the anxieties generated by the women Wier studies are even more pronounced in Wier than in Agrippa, though perhaps not at first glance. For example, though he singles out women as victims in his work, he does not single out only women as likely to fall. There are also

[m]elancholics . . . persons distressed because of loss or for any other reason . . . people without faith in God, the impious, the illicitly curious, the people wrongly trained in the Christian tradition, the envious [and the hateful] . . . the malicious, old women not in possession of their faculties, and similiarly foolish women of noted malice or slippery and wavering faith. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, in Book 6, which discusses “the Punishment of Notorious Magicians, Witches, and Poisoners,” Wier tells his reader that the Council of Laodicea found it necessary to decree that “[c]lerics and those who hold religious office must not be

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<sup>14</sup> Care 42.

<sup>15</sup> Mora and Shea lxiv.

<sup>16</sup> Mora and Shea lxiii.

<sup>17</sup> Mora and Shea 180-81.

magicians and enchanters.”<sup>18</sup> The necessity of law-making discovers the reality behind the law—there must have been sufficient instances of priest-practitioners to warrant the prohibition.

However, this openness is weakened elsewhere. The “melancholics, etc.” passage cited above occurs in the book “Of Lamiae” (which are inherently women); the next chapter is entitled, “Concerning the credulity and frailty of the female sex.”<sup>19</sup> This undermines the passage which precedes it, specifically stating, “Most often, however, that crafty schemer the Devil thus influences the female sex.”<sup>20</sup>

Mora and Shea find in Wier a “combination of mysticism and skepticism” which is a “typical expression of the crisis of the Renaissance, as a sign of the transition from the old to the new view of the world.”<sup>21</sup> They do not deny Wier’s misogyny, but prefer to see him as a forward-striding modern psycho-medical professional:

Weyer gives the most common characteristics of these women in innumerable passages. Here are some of Weyer’s descriptive terms: raving, poor, simple, useless, ignorant, gullible, stupid, vile, uneducated, infatuated, toothless, silly, unsteady, decrepit old women. In using these terms, he exhibits the misogyny common to his contemporaries and to many of the following generations. But elsewhere, he defines the same women as mentally unstable, deluded, driven by melancholia; he refers to them in another passage as “innocent women”. . . . Still in another instance, he attributes the accusation of witchcraft to “jealousy against a neighbor or a revenge against an enemy”. . . . This last point is very much in line with findings of contemporary research on Renaissance witchcraft.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mora and Shea 487.

<sup>19</sup> Mora and Shea 181.

<sup>20</sup> Mora and Shea 181.

<sup>21</sup> Mora and Shea xxx.

<sup>22</sup> Mora and Shea lxii-lxiii.



Wier's transition, however, is only for himself and his profession, not for the women he discusses. "Mentally unstable" and "deluded" are not terms which argue for equality of treatment; rather they call for the exercise of (masculine) control and professional pity.

Furthermore, Wier displays anxiety over witches' speech. An extract from Book 3, "Of Lamiae," reads, "[I]t is as 'grave' an offense to spit upon the ground at the time of the Elevation as it is to keep the *sputum* in the mouth; and the speaking of irrelevant words deserves equal punishment outside of the Mass as during its celebration."<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that three books later Wier alleges, "the point is made that no one can be injured by words or curses,"<sup>24</sup> "wasting words" is still a crime. The power of words spilled in irrelevancy—i.e., in women's speech or gossip—causes worry. Moreover, loose tongues ought to be punished outside the church as well as within its walls. This point of view differs very little from what we see in England in both the texts under discussion and in some of the pamphlets.

Guillaume Alexis published his An Interlocucion with an argument betwyxt man and woman & whiche of them could proue to be most excelle[n]t in 1525.<sup>25</sup>

Diane Bornstein has this to say of his dialogue:

Although a great deal of space is given to anti-feminist arguments in this work, it subtly takes a feminist direction. The woman is given the better rhetorical position since she has the final word. Moreover her final speech is longer than any of the man's. She is allowed to be more magnanimous, since she states she will not reveal all the evil she knows about men (thus refuting some of the man's claims about the indiscretion of women). . . .<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mora and Shea 178.

<sup>24</sup> Mora and Shea 509.

<sup>25</sup> Guillaume Alexis, An Interlocucion with an argument betwyxt man and woman & whiche of them could proue to be most excelle[n]t, Bornstein n.p. All references to this edition.

<sup>26</sup> Bornstein ix.



However, Bornstein misses the constructed irony in the pamphlet. In the dialogue, the woman has the last word, but that has been one of the man's contentions—that women cannot bear not to. Furthermore, in the work as a whole, Alexis, not his characters, has the last word, which robs the woman's speech of its rhetorical strength. The fact that the woman's last speech is longer than any of the man's also strengthens the man's position, for the reader can see she possesses the very garrulousness her sex is said to possess. Though the woman is not constructed as a witch *per se*, she, along with others in the debate on the nature of women, falls into the category of the unruly woman who must be controlled.

George Gifford's A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes has four characters in it: three men and a woman.<sup>27</sup> The dialogue consists of the wise Daniel convincing his male counterparts, by means of reasoned argument, that there are no such things as witches—only the Devil's delusions. The woman, however, does not contribute to the argument. Her interjections demonstrate that she is not capable of reasoned argument, like the men; furthermore, she remains unconvinced, showing that she cannot be swayed by reason. Secondarily this proves the point that women are more prone to the Devil's influence. When at the end of the piece the schoolmaster is finally convinced of Daniel's wisdom, the Goodwife sees this as a betrayal, stating, "What tell you me of Gods worde, doth not Gods word say there be witches . . . Are you a turnecote? Fare you well. I will take no longer with you."<sup>28</sup> Unreasonably, she will not stay to argue. Tellingly, her husband states after her departure, "She is wilfull

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<sup>27</sup> George Gifford, A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes 1593, ed. Beatrice White (London: Oxford UP, 1931). Its subtitle is "In whiche is laide open how craftely the Diuell deceiueth not onely the Witches but many other [sic] and so leadeth them awrie into many great *errors*."

<sup>28</sup> Gifford T4v.

in dede. I will leave you also.”<sup>29</sup> The Goodwife’s strength of mind and belief is wilfulness. She is a shrew, precisely that sort of woman most likely to fall into the errors of the subtitle, and must be looked after by her good husband.

In this oft-cited passage of Reginald Scot’s The Discoverie of Witchcraft, such women as the Goodwife are thrown together with the common image of the hag as those prone to be witches:

One sort of such as are said to be witches are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles, poore, sullen, superstitious and papists; or suche as knowe no religion: in whose drowsie mindes the divell hath gotten a fine seat. [They are deluded into thinking agency of malice and mischance is theirs, not the Devil’s.] . . . They are lean and deformed, shewing melancolie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, divelish. . . .<sup>30</sup>

More tellingly, Scot goes on to equate female constancy of speech and belief with delusion, going a step further than Gifford. These mad scolds who do not defer to more learned people are “so firme and stedfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easilie beleeve they were true indeed.”<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, he refers to witches as “poore women (whose cheefe fault is that they are scolds).”<sup>32</sup>

Scot also equates begging or borrowing with lewdness. Women who do such are not granted what they seek, “but rather their lewdnesse is by their neighbors reprooved.”<sup>33</sup> The subtitle of XIII.x., “The bewitching venome contened in the bodie

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<sup>29</sup> Gifford T4v.

<sup>30</sup> Scot 4.

<sup>31</sup> Scot 4.

<sup>32</sup> Scot 19.

<sup>33</sup> Scot 5.



of an harlot, how hir eie, hir toong, hir beautie and behavior bewitcheth some men,” clearly links sex, sexuality, speech, and witchcraft.<sup>34</sup>

In the long excerpt above Scot notes that he outlines “one sort” of witches. He also outlines the characteristics of the cunning women, giving them the hubris “to do anie thing, which God or the divell can doo: either for foretelling of things to come, bewraieing of secrets, curing of maladies, or working of miracles.”<sup>35</sup> He also mentions Classical witches such as Circe and Medea, using language I will return to in subsequent chapters: “And first *Ovid* affirmeth, that they can raise and suppress lightning and thunder . . . tempests and earthquakes. Others doo write, that they can pull down the moone and the starres.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite the fact that the Scot’s treatise is based heavily upon others’—for example, he cites Bodin so frequently one has little need to read him—he is a canny author as well. He dismisses Bodin and his company as “*Bodin*, and all the popish writers in general,” but on the other hand he uses their material to titillate his reader. In III.xx, for example, Scot uses a series of bawdy anecdotes, rather than a reasoned argument, to keep his readers turning pages. By urging the reader to pass over “such abominable lecheries, as are gathered out of the bookes of those witchmongers (although doctors of divinitie, and otherwise of great authoritie and estimation) . . . [in which leaves] I have like a groome thrust their bawdie stuffe (even that which I my self loath) as into a stinking corner,” Scot achieves the opposite effect.<sup>37</sup> Curiously, unlike other treatises, in which the various spells (or alleged spells) are sprinkled

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<sup>34</sup> Scot 172.

<sup>35</sup> Scot 5.

<sup>36</sup> Scot 6.

<sup>37</sup> Scot 41.



throughout the book to report (or refute) them, Scot reserves his last book for a spellbook complete with figures. The refutation comes after the complete presentation. If one were looking for a compendium of spells, Scot could be seen as a useful one.<sup>38</sup>

Scot shares his dismissal of Continental writers as “mere” Papists with other English writers; it seems to be a fairly common denominator amongst contributors to the witchcraft debate, both pro and con. Two believers in witchcraft will serve as brief examples. Alex Roberts spends some time in A Treatise of Witchcraft (1616) discussing the fact that witchcraft has grown less popular since (unspecified) pagans have been converted and especially since Papists have been dispersed.<sup>39</sup> He sides with Jewish viewpoints rather than agree with a Papist, citing as authority, “It is a common speach amongst the Iewish Rabbins, many women, many witches.”<sup>40</sup>

William Perkins, whose A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft was published in 1608, proves unique amongst those texts read for this study, because he immediately brings in five Popes as practitioners of the black arts. Before any consideration of gender or class, therefore, Perkins constructs Popery as the main villain.<sup>41</sup> Perkins testifies to the scepticism of those such as Scot, claiming that “they doe grossly erre, who either in expresse tearmes denie that there bee witches, or in

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<sup>38</sup> James VI and I stands out in this area as well, including neither spellbook nor description of witches’ practises in his treatise. Instead, curiously, he refers his readers to Bodin, and for rites and rituals to Agrippa and Wier, thereby encouraging his reader to find the very texts he would allegedly not have them read.

<sup>39</sup> Witches and Witch-hunters: A reprint of A Treatise of Witchcraft by Alex Roberts (1616), The Discovery of Witches by Mathew Hopkins [sic] (1647), Scottish Witchcraft trials by J.W.Brodie (1891) (Wakefield: S.R. Publishers, 1971), Roberts passim.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts 40. Roberts’ view of women will be touched on below.

<sup>41</sup> William Perkins, A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft: so farre forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience (Cambridge, 1608) 10. (The copy consulted used both folio marks and, in the main body of the text, page numbers. Where possible page numbers will be used, especially as there are errors in folio marks.)

effect, and by consequent; auouching that there is no league between them and the Deuill,” and pointing out that his main argument is with the former.<sup>42</sup> One of his primary concerns is that not only the common sort fall into the error of scepticism. To his dismay, educated men (such as, one could assume, Scot) also fall into this trap: “that Witchcraft is nothing els but a meere illusion, and witches nothing but persons deluded by the deuill: and this opinion takes place not onely with the ignorant, but is holden and maintained by such as are learned, who doe auouch it by word and writing, that there be no witches.”<sup>43</sup>

Whereas, as Mora and Shea note, Wier believes that “intrinsic to the phenomenon of witchcraft is a disturbance of the imagination,”<sup>44</sup> Scot constructs not witchcraft but the *belief* in witchcraft as a sin. Because of his ironic approach and lack of fear in criticizing the Church, Scot is often seen as an atheist, something which he denies. However, critics from Scot’s own day to the present interpret him as such. James VI and I wrote to countermand him, as we have seen; the Rev. Montague Summers, introducing Scot, states his main flaw is that “he wholly and essentially denies the supernatural.”<sup>45</sup> Wier, according to Summers, “at least recognized that Satan and the demon have extensive powers; that they may and do interefere with the

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<sup>42</sup> Perkins ¶5v-¶6r. (This symbol is the closest I can achieve to the backwards, filled-in P which marks the folio before A, which has no other form of marking.)

<sup>43</sup> Perkins 2.

<sup>44</sup> Mora and Shea lxiii.

<sup>45</sup> Summers xxx.

welfare of mankind.”<sup>46</sup> This demonstrates Summers’ like conviction; for this reason, Summers is discounted as a scholar or critic today.<sup>47</sup>

Scot is not so much an atheist as a reasoned rationalist. He declares that fault falls not upon the “witches” but upon the credulous and guilty who deny God, or at least God’s correction and judgment. When he states,

For if any adversitie, greefe, sicknesse, loss of children, come, cattell, or libertie happen unto them; by & by they exclaim uppon witches . . . [they do not believe] but that certeine old women heere on earth, called witches, must needs be the contrivers of all men calamities, and as though they themselves were innocents, and had deserved no such punishments. . . .<sup>48</sup>

the statement belies an inherently Christian belief in sin, perhaps even original sin, and just retribution. Scot may make automatic associations between witches and old women, but he does the same with priests and conjurers, and his anti-Papist viewpoint has been noted.<sup>49</sup> When discussing witches, he underlines that the sin is attributing to old women the power to create as God does; however, at the same time he remains objective enough accurately to dissect and analyse the anatomy of a witch and her trial. Witness the following:

I praie you, therefore, though it be tedious & intollerable . . . so heare with compassion, their accusations, examinations, matters given in evidence, confessions, presumptions, interrogations, conjurations, cautions, crimes, tortures and condemnations, deuised and practised usuallie against them.<sup>50</sup>

Here Scot conflates witch and accuser, and cries for Christian charity and compassion in dealing with the deluded whilst implying it is the accusers who are deluded. He notes the tortures used against the accused (it was known for accused witches to be

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<sup>46</sup> Summers xxxi.

<sup>47</sup> Ironically, it is Summers’ translation of the Malleus Maleficarum that has made that text widely available in English.

<sup>48</sup> Scot 1, my emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Scot 1.



kept awake for days until they confessed, for example), which the witch-hunters denied were such. He challenges his readers in areas they consider sacrosanct; therefore he is discounted as a heretic or, worse, an atheist. Sharpe observes that Scot's viewpoint "was very difficult to reconcile with the mainstream of late-sixteenth-century Christianity."<sup>51</sup>

Whatever the status of Gifford's belief in God, his belief in the Devil is unshakeable. He believes witches to be the Devil's pawns, who bring both themselves and those who believe in them to harm. He states repeatedly that devils are constrained by God and do nothing but by God's will; to answer how they affect men, Gifford argues that sometimes God grants dispensation for them to harm men or beasts. It is a complicated situation which essentially makes the witch into God's scapegoat instead of society's. Though in A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles Gifford queries, "[W]hat hurt doth shee: If yee aske the common people, yee shall haue this answere: shee is the very pestilence of the earth, all calamity is brought vpon men by her," he exempts himself from delusion.<sup>52</sup> Only "the common people" believe this, not the rational learned man. That man can see that "God is prouoked by their [those who fall into "the common error"] sinnes to giue the deuill such instruments to work withall," and furthermore, "For using witches as their [devils'] instruments, they make them beleue that they doe manie harmes . . . which they do not, and whereas they have power giuen them by God to afflict, they will seeme to doe it at the wrath and displeasure of the witch."<sup>53</sup> In essence Gifford deplores the

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<sup>50</sup> Scot 10.

<sup>51</sup> Sharpe 55.

<sup>52</sup> George Gifford, A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles: London, 1587 (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977) G2v.

<sup>53</sup> Gifford Witches D3v, F1r.

ignorance which leads to the evil witches bring about; however, his Christian fervour means he lacks Scot's objective eye. He cannot see the process of the construction of the witch. As Beatrice White notes, "With him . . . it is not a question of de existentia but of de modo existendi."<sup>54</sup>

Both A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes and A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles also betray underlying societal, patriarchal beliefs about witches and women. Though he admits the existence of cunning men and wise women (also evil), and mentions a village where three woman and a man are witches (Witches C1r), Gifford automatically associates witches with old women, always glossing a witch as "she." The first reference in A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles runs, "The Witch is not allso great, but the poore old hagge thinketh her selfe strong, that shee hath two or three servants as she may seme to plague such as she is offended withall."<sup>55</sup> A witch's inherent hagness is underlined in his other treatise, where the first mention is "These witches, these euill-fauoured old witches doe trouble mee."<sup>56</sup>

In answer to whether or not witches have done him harm, a character in Witches and Witchcraftes says, "Trust me I cannot tell, but I feare me I have [run afoul], for there be two or three in our towne which I like not, but especially an old woman" who frowns "now and then" despite being treated (the speaker alleges) as his own mother.<sup>57</sup> This is the closest Gifford comes to being sceptical. We can read in the dis-ease which leads to the suspicion of witches, and the concern of society with

<sup>54</sup> White vi.

<sup>55</sup> Gifford Deviles G1v.

<sup>56</sup> Gifford Witches A4v.

<sup>57</sup> Gifford Witches A4v-B1r.

witches and maternity. In The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, Old Demdike is said to have “brought up her owne Children, instructed her Graunde-children, and tooke great care and paines to bring them to be Witches.”<sup>58</sup> Here Potts uses the language of devoted maternity to describe moral corruption.

When the wife in Witches and Witchcraftes says, “I met the olde filth this morning Lord, how sowerlie she looked upon me, & mumbled as she went,” we can see the image of the poor mumbling old woman which Dekker manipulates in The Witch of Edmonton.<sup>59</sup> The wife continues, “I heard part of her wordes. Ah (quod she) you have an honest man to your husband, I heare how he doth vse me.”<sup>60</sup> The wife grows angry at this. Either her husband does not treat the woman as respectfully as he says he does, or praise implies its opposite—a common belief which is also mentioned in Wier, who mentions the characteristic of death by over-praise.<sup>61</sup>

Roberts proves a useful compendium of the beliefs of witches and women. Though he admits there there can be male witches, he believes, “More women in a farre different proportion prooue Witches then men, by a hundred to one.”<sup>62</sup> He does cite one or two exempla of women holding their tongues, but then, just as in Alexis’ Interlocucion, he evinces the common arguments that women are credulous, curious, garrulous and morally weak. Unlike the anonymous author of A Rehearsal both Straung and True (1579), who argues throughout his Preface that witches cannot do anything without the Devil, but the Devil can do much—indeed, too much—without

<sup>58</sup> Potts B1v-B2r.

<sup>59</sup> Gifford Witches B2v.

<sup>60</sup> Gifford Witches B2v.

<sup>61</sup> Mora and Shea 265.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts 40.



witches,<sup>63</sup> Roberts states clearly that the Devil's power is women's fault: "And if the Diuell had not seduced the minde of the wicked woman, no such matter would haue beene attempted. And againe, if hee had not the Witch to bee his instrument, the Diuell were debarred of his purpose."<sup>64</sup> He conflates the witch with Eve, extrapolating that all evil, especially the evil of witchcraft, is women's fault; if it were not for women, the Devil would have no hold upon the earth. Echoing what Scot argues against in the epigraph to this chapter, Roberts alleges, "this sex, when it conceiueth wrath or hatred against any, is vnplacable, possessed with vnsatiable desire of revenge."<sup>65</sup> He also echoes what threatens men most: "[T]hey are of a slippery tongue, and full of words."<sup>66</sup> Though Roberts himself does not link this directly with women's sexuality, the conflation between the witch and Eve is enough to supply it.

Roberts was a vicar in King's Lynn and, along with the other treatise-writers in this chapter, exemplifies the learned view of witchcraft, which may or may not incorporate popular belief. Perkins lifts his discussion furthest above the physical world, rendering a philosophical argument which circles around his concern with education and learning. Because of this, he presents what may seem like a balanced viewpoint, claiming that both men and women may be witches. In fact, only once does he default to the feminine pronoun when discussing witches (215). He has no section specifically on women; women are not named in the index. However, because

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<sup>63</sup> A Rehearsal both straung and true, of hainous and horrible acts committed by Elizabeth Stile, alias Rockingham, Mother Durren, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, Fower notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore [sic] in the countie of Barks, and at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed, on the 26 daye of Februarie laste Anno 1579 (London), passim.

<sup>64</sup> Roberts 24.

<sup>65</sup> Roberts 43.

<sup>66</sup> Roberts 43.

of Perkins' concern with "high," learned culture, he essentially discounts women as worthy of discourse. His bias is no less than Roberts', though differently constructed.

Firstly, he constructs witchcraft as an art, as his title states—a "damned art," but an art nonetheless. He states,

For as in all good and lawfull arts, the whole practise thereof is performed by certeine rules and precepts, and without them nothing can be done: so Witchcraft hath certaine superstitious grounds and principles whereupon it standeth, and by which alone the feats and practises thereof are commonly performed.<sup>67</sup>

This construction hearkens to classical definitions of witchcraft and allows him to escape the chaotic license allowed to the witch (or the devil) in other treatises and in popular belief—beliefs which Perkins would term ignorant. The "good and lawfull arts" are "taught in schooles of learning, which, as they are warrantable by the word of God, so are they no lesse profitable and necessary in the Church."<sup>68</sup> The good arts, by being located within the sphere of the Church, are, like higher learning, beyond a woman's sphere. Perkins never states this, but it lies implicit. Perkins believes only those with learning can speak truly, as evidenced in his discussion about the witch of Endor: "There was no great vertue in the matter or frame of her words, for she was ignorant and had no learning."<sup>69</sup> This may betray a class bias as well as a gender bias—"ignorant" may also signify lower class, or "common."

When discussing the magician or magus (as in Simon Magus), Perkins observes, "I comprehend both sexes or kinds of persons, men and women, excluding neither from beeing witches."<sup>70</sup> One of the benefits of basing his observations upon

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<sup>67</sup> Perkins 4.

<sup>68</sup> Perkins 8.

<sup>69</sup> Perkins 45.

<sup>70</sup> Perkins 168.

scriptural writings is that it lets him do this, though it removes him from actual experience.<sup>71</sup> Moses, states Perkins, uses a feminine word to describe witches because women are weaker (note Perkins distances this argument from him by this mechanism) and to demonstrate that “weaknes cannot exempt the Witch from death.”<sup>72</sup>

Another benefit of his scriptural philosophy is that it allows him subtly to address a major concern: the “defection” of learned men from the goodly and godly ranks. Like his king, James VI and I, Perkins believes that the good or white witch, which he calls Wisemen or Wise-women (175), are worse than the evil-doers. Sharpe notes,

Of the cunning folk for whom records survive [over the period 1560-1675] . . . some two-thirds were men, and John Stearne the witch-hunter commented that while “hurting witches” tended to be women, “those called white or good witches . . . almost generally they be men.”<sup>73</sup>

More work is needed, states Sharpe, but existing records imply “there was no predominance of women among cunning folk and that the more learning or technique was demonstrated in the cunning folks’ ‘good’ magic, the more likely it was that the practitioner would be male.”<sup>74</sup> If we combine these observations with Perkins’ concerns, it becomes evident that for William Perkins, the most reprehensible practitioner of witchcraft is the cunning or wiseman, simply because they are learned men defecting to the ignorant masses, pandering to their unjustified superstitions and profiting by them. These learned cunning men would have had command of Latin, or

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<sup>71</sup> As Sharpe notes, “In only one decade, the 1570s, did anything like a significant proportion of male witches appear . . . even here forming only 20 per cent of the total” (114).

<sup>72</sup> Perkins 169.

<sup>73</sup> Sharpe 189.

<sup>74</sup> Sharpe 189. Mother Bombie and the Wise-woman of Hogsdon become more remarkable hereby.



at least Latin phrases, as well as books to back up their practises. Thus Hecate's assumption of the Latin tongue in The Witch becomes not just a harking back to classical witches, but also a means whereby to threaten those who adhere to Perkins' philosophy, for she trespasses upon the male learned sphere.

If one reads patriarchal biases in the learned pamphlets, one also sees societal beliefs and practises manifested in the witchcraft pamphlets, of which The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster and The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys will serve as examples.<sup>75</sup>

These texts reveal not only those events which led to witchcraft persecutions, but also the day-to-day occurrences and domestic structures which made up the tightly-knit, sometimes claustrophobic village communities of the texts.

Beneath the text of The Witches of Warboys runs a story of scepticism, frustrated youth and an abusive husband. The author of the pamphlet does not proclaim himself as such, but the use of "we" in several instances throughout the text locates him on the side of the investigators and witch-provers. "Widdowe Orwin" printed the pamphlet for "Thomas Man, and Iohn Winnington," of whom the narrator may be speaking when, in the dedication, he speaks of "our boldnes," though it remains unclear. Male voices are the voices which count in this pamphlet; though the accusing voices (those of the afflicted children) are female, all the investigators are male. Throughout the narrative, Alice Samuel, the accused, pleads her innocence. The children's fits continue intermittently; they only end when Alice Samuel repeats what the father of the afflicted girls tells her what to say.<sup>76</sup> The word of the

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<sup>75</sup> The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys (London, 1593). Hereafter Witches of Warboys.

<sup>76</sup> Though both Alice's husband John and her daughter Agnes are also accused, the main part of the text deals with Alice's story.

paterfamilias, even when ventriloquised through the mouth of the alleged witch, brings back order.

The Warboys incidents begin in 1589. The fits of the girls continue on and off for three years before any case is brought. In the first instance of fits, the mother rebukes her child, essentially for play-acting. The fits then spread to other children in the family, in a style very reminiscent of the much later epidemic in Salem, Massachusetts. Throughout the three years Alice Samuel tries to retain the part of the good neighbour. The father of the family retains his scepticism longest, and it is worth noting that Mother Samuel still serves as gossip for family births (of the afflicted girls' cousins) well into the three-year period, denoting some sort of good standing in the neighbourhood.<sup>77</sup>

The subtext of the girls' fits is one of stifled frustration. As girls, they rarely get out of the house, and, it seems, never out of the immediate area—when some of the eldest go to live with relatives a distance off, the fits cease (and start again when re-introduced to the original family circle). The ages of the girls span adolescence—we learn that in 1592 the second youngest was 14 (E3v). Moreover, in their fits the girls express precisely what they should not. When in their fits they are merry; they laugh; they refuse to do those domestic chores which their role in life dictates for them. In short, their “possession” is a means of escape from a claustrophobic world and role.

The narrator does not say this. He does, however, point these very things out as examples of possession, for “good girls” would not behave so. For example, “[A]mongst many other things this is worthy to be noted, that being in her fit she looked farre more sweetely and cherefully than when shee is awake . . . yet once being

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<sup>77</sup> E3r&v.



awaked and out of her fit, she is as well as any body.”<sup>78</sup> Her “wellness” consists of a level decorum which befits her. Moreover, “shee had all merry fits, full of exceeding laughter . . . and that so hartely and excessively, as that if they had been awaked they would have been ashamed thereof.”<sup>79</sup> For “would,” one can read “should.”

Throughout the text, activities such as reading and carding are those most likely to provoke fits.

The domestic situation of Mother Samuel is a difficult one. John Samuel is a possessive, jealous and abusive husband. He is described as “a froward man, [who] woulde not suffer her to talke with any, if he might know it.”<sup>80</sup> At one point Mother Samuel attempts to communicate privately with one Throckmorton, asking him not to tell her husband. Her husband’s response runs thus: “[H]e utterly forswore the matter, & presently fell vpon his wife, and beat her very sore with a cudgel, many being present, before she could be rescued by them.”<sup>81</sup> Earlier, when accosted by a group of scholars looking for the truth of the children’s fits, Mother Samuel “would needs be gone, saying, that her husband would beate her for long tarrying.”<sup>82</sup> What provokes her husband’s wrath is her speech with other men; again, this is a link between women’s speech and sexuality. When she does speak with the group of scholars, they find her difficult to deal with, as she is strong-minded and does not allow them as much speech as they wished: “But she was very lowde in her answers, and impatient, not suffering any to speake but her selfe: one of them desired her to

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<sup>78</sup> B4r.

<sup>79</sup> C1r.

<sup>80</sup> D4v.

<sup>81</sup> F1r.

<sup>82</sup> E1r.



keépe [sic] the womans vertue, and be more silent: she answered, that she was borne in a mill, begot in a kill, she must have her will, she could speak no softer.”<sup>83</sup>

Clearly the Warboys community values “the womans vertue”; any not possessing it are either possessed themselves or a witch. The girls, as victims, can be reconciled to their family and society; there is no such outlet for Mother Samuel, though, as the chilling spectacle of her public beating shows, she is just as much a victim.

In The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, Potts controls the narrative, never giving direct speech to any of the women involved (one may contrast Henry Goodcole’s pamphlet about Elizabeth Sawyer, discussed in the chapter on The Witch of Edmonton). As already noted, Potts’ first concern is to praise the probity of the judges and judiciary system. In fact, the ultimate power lies in a judge’s hand. Edward Bromley, Justice of the Assize, in essence edited the manuscript. He writes, “After he [Potts] had taken great paines to finish it, I tooke vpon mee to reuise and correct it, that nothing might passe but matter of Fact. . . .It is very little he hath inserted, and that necessarie, to shew what their offences were, what people, and of what condition they were.”<sup>84</sup> More blatantly than with Perkins, we have the condescension of a learned class to the ignorant masses, something also seen with Henry Goodcole, who classes Elizabeth Sawyer as ignorant.

The main body of the text revolves around Old Demdike, an old woman and allegedly a witch of long standing. Beneath the narrative we see also her rivalry with Anne Chattox: the two women have been competing for power and social dominance all their lives. The narrator states both women are around eighty years of age and Chattox (also called Whittle) was “always opposite to old Demdike: For whom the

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<sup>83</sup> D4v-E1r.

<sup>84</sup> Potts n.p. (or folio mark). My emphasis.

one favoured, the other hated deadly: and how they envie and accuse one an other, in their Examination, may appeare.”<sup>85</sup> In evidence of this, Chattox avowed that “shee perceiuing Anthonie Nutter of Pendle to favour Elizabeth Sowthernes [Demdike], acted against him.”<sup>86</sup> There are instances in which Demdike claims that her familiar bade her help Chattox bewitch a family, but that she refused. Chattox makes claims that she could have bewitched someone, but she refused. It seems that the women are more interested in bettering the other through simultaneous demonstrations of power and virtue (or restraint) than of clearing themselves or their families. The domestic tensions with Old Demdike’s family also manifest: her daughter and grandson also stand accused, and her youngest grandchild testifies against her own mother and brother. Device siblings also testify one against Chattox and another against his grandmother (Demdike), competing for attention.

Several instances of narratorial intervention set the scene and prejudice the reader against the defendants from the outset. Firstly, the narrator claims he needs,

to lay open the life and death of the damnable and malicious Witch, of so long continuance (old Demdike) of whom our whole businesse hath such dependance, that without the particular Declaration and Record of her Euidence, with the circumstaunces, wee shall neuer bring any thing to good perfection. . . .<sup>87</sup>

All sins stem from Demdike’s, and without her story the narrator’s story fails. He imbues her with a sort of classical power which is clearly imposed from the outside, for she herself evidences no learning: “[N]o man escaped her or her Furies, that euer gaue them occasion of offence.”<sup>88</sup> This at the last is Demdike’s power, and she gains

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<sup>85</sup> Potts D2r.

<sup>86</sup> Potts E3r.

<sup>87</sup> Potts B1v.

<sup>88</sup> Potts B2r.

ultimate supremacy over Anne Chattox, who is given an important but secondary place: “I place her . . . in order, next to that wicked fire-brand of mischief, old Demdike, because from these two, sprung all the rest in order: and were the Children and Friendes, of these two notorious Witches.”<sup>89</sup> Again we clearly see witchcraft constructed as a maternal, almost matriarchal system.

Another narratorial judgement runs, “This Elizabeth Deuice was the daughter of Elizabeth Sothern [sic] . . . a malicious, wicked, and dangerous Witch for fiftie yeares, as appeareth by Record.”<sup>90</sup> Here the narrator contradicts the given evidence, which states twenty years. There are other interventions of the judicial or narratorial “I,” even in the examinations.

Elizabeth Deuice claims she bewitched her victim because he had condemned her for having a bastard child. This, combined with her support for her blind and widowed mother, is enough to raise feeling against her. Her daughter Alizon was once leading her grandmother when they met with a man who without provocation said, “[G]et out of my ground, Whores and Witches, I will burne the one of you, and hang the other. To whom this Examinee [Demdike] replied, I care not for thee, hang thy selfe. . . .”<sup>91</sup> The daughter suffers the mother’s reputation. In Demdike’s confession, this insult to herself and her family is the only instance of her setting her familiar on someone. This happened just before one Christmas, and there may be an underlying feeling that the man should have acted with more timely charity.

One should note that it is the rivalries within families as well as the incidents themselves which fuel the trial. Illness may follow an alleged bewitching, but death is

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<sup>89</sup> Potts D2r.

<sup>90</sup> Potts F2v.

<sup>91</sup> Potts B3r.



rarely hard on its heels. Robert Nutter, for example, one of the Chattox's alleged victims, died away in Cheshire. Robert thought he had been bewitched, but his father was sceptical.<sup>92</sup> Chattox testifies that Robert Nutter's two female cousins wanted her to kill him so that they could have his land; she also states those cousins tried as hard as she to kill Nutter. The witch is caught up in domestic, personal, claustrophobic tangles. (Alice Nutter was arraigned as well.)

The extent to which the accusers and defendants are constructing a narrative is evident in the examination of James Device. There is no evidence of his having a familiar until his little sister Iennet gives him one and names him Dandy. Previous to this he had protested he had denied his soul to the Devil and that he belonged to Christ. Hereafter James makes use of Dandy in his own narrative, constructing a confession which fits the common perception. Iennet, a nine-year-old, is constructed throughout the pamphlet as an angel of God sent to cry out against her family and others.<sup>93</sup> Her word damns her brother (who was executed and probably tortured with at least lack of sleep, given the description of him appearing in court).<sup>94</sup> Possession of a familiar is understood as proof positive: "[T]he wrinkles of an old wiues face is good euidence to the Iurie against a witch. . . .But old Chattox had Fancie [her familiar], besides her withered face, to accuse her."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Potts E2r.

<sup>93</sup> Some years later, however, she is cried out and tried.

<sup>94</sup> He was "so insensible, weake, and vnable in all thinges, as he could neither speake, heare, or stand, but was holden vp when hee was brought to the place of his Arraignement" (H2r). Despite this, his confession is constructed for him; the narratorial "I" is particularly prevalent here. The narrator also finds James' appearance very suspicious, believing he is feigning illness or trying to take his own life in order not to answer to justice.

<sup>95</sup> Potts M2r.

The hag is a strong image of the witch. But Gifford equates shrews with hags; James VI and I along with others discusses the occult powers of witches; Wier discusses lamiae and witches. Scot clearly links sex, sexuality and witchcraft, enough to provide the reader with support for the unruly woman as witch. Speech and sexuality are also linked in these texts. Scot discusses cunning women; wise women and wise men come into play in Perkins as well as other texts under discussion in this chapter and elsewhere. Circe and Medea do not escape mention.

But the images and the treatment of the witches portrayed in this list of types are not cut and dried. Both learned treatises and pamphlets more concerned with a less learned audience convey the witch as a construct, prey to varying narratives with different agenda. Although in some cases, such as those of Old Demdike and Anne Chattox, the accused themselves utilise their trials and definition to further their own ends, in most cases the witch is a figure manipulated to serve their authors' ends. Whilst doing so, they also reveal the societal anxieties which lie beneath the surface—something which is evident in The Faerie Queene and the rest of the texts under discussion.

CHAPTER 2. DUALISM AND DEFERRAL--SPENSER'S THE FAERIE QUEENE

In The Faerie Queene one finds most of the types of witch and strong women which have their basis in theory and in treatises such as were discussed in the previous chapter. Spenser, however, "creates fictional constructs rather than real women. His female characters are types—witches, hags, viragos, mothers, monsters—and therefore are more easily manipulated both to serve his purpose and to demonstrate the dis-ease he feels. The Faerie Queene is in essence a sort of reservoir of these types, and therefore serves as a useful starting point for this study.

Spenser has two main methods of dealing with his witch-women and monsters. The first consists of a consistent and thorough doubling of light and dark, often achieved by means of imagery. This doubling ostensibly demonstrates the difference between good and bad women. Instead it serves to highlight further the subterranean, male-oriented fears about powerful women. Secondly, he defers his dis-ease with a given subject—maternity, for example—and constructs a character who discovers the hidden secrets of that subject.<sup>1</sup>

Medieval thought had both externalised and embraced one particular dichotomy: that of the Virgin/Magdalene.<sup>2</sup> Renaissance Europe, looking back to classical examples, adopted Venus-Virgo as its secular analogy. This adoption held special significance for England and its monarch. Head of a church which her father had founded, and which had been upset already by one monarch, Elizabeth I had to divorce herself from old Catholic imagery as well as Catholic popery. The neo-Platonic Venus/Virgo nicely filled the niche; and subtly, by replacing the Virgin/Magdalene dialectic, reinforced Elizabeth as the spiritual head of the Church of England. Elizabeth presented herself as the Virgin Queen; however, she was also

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<sup>1</sup> One character who crosses all boundaries set in the poem crosses the boundaries being made here as well: Duessa, who in addition to being Cambina's double acts on her own behalf, stirring up other female monsters by means of her treacherous femininity.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex (1976; New York: Vintage, 1983).



set up as the desirable woman whom men sought to serve. Spenser was one of the first to recognise her in this guise and incorporate in literature Elizabeth's dual identity as Venus/Virgo. Spenser wrote about the Queen in this guise in 1578; it did not come into common literary usage for another two decades.<sup>3</sup> By that time, Spenser had developed his version of Gloriana into The Faerie Queene.

Women proliferate in Spenser's epic, though only two, the problematic Britomart who, though in guise of a knight, is chiefly important as a chaste woman and the progenitrix of Elizabeth I/Gloriana, and the absent signifier of Gloriana herself, ever achieve epic status akin to that of the questing heroes. The female characters, however, are no less valid than the male characters, though they may not achieve heroism or even as much individualism as the men. Sheila T. Cavanagh asserts,

Throughout Spenser's epic, female characters regularly serve as tropes, their meanings tentative and deferred, with their bodies seemingly reflected through fragmented "mirrours more than one" (III.Proem:5.6). Under provocation, Duessa's body reveals the loathsomeness hiding behind her beauty, and the Snowy Florimell evaporates in front of the assembled company. Even Gloriana's body epitomizes deferral by its continued absence and single uncertain moment of possible presence, helping focus our attention on the insubstantiality associated with women's physicality in the poem.<sup>4</sup>

This deferral of meaning is reflected in the poem in either out-and-out horror or a duality, in which a "good" woman is reflected in or by a "bad" one, or vice versa. Duessa is Una's counterpart in one sense, but Cambina's in another. Guyon conquers Acrasia with hardly a fight, but only after he has been conquered and tutored by Acrasia's magical counterpart, Fidelia. Guyon himself has a magical nemesis, quite literally set up as an evil Genius. Finally, in a divine battle in which she must seek and usurp pagan aid, Britomart, the maiden, overthrows Radigund, the mother/crone,

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<sup>3</sup>Strong 48.

<sup>4</sup>Sheila T. Cavanagh, Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires (Bloomington, IN: U of Indiana P, 1994) 6.

in a battle for lunar as well as secular supremacy. As another aspect of Gloriana's godhead was Cynthia, goddess of the moon, this battle is of paramount importance.

Spenser makes many of his major female figures enchantresses of one sort or another.<sup>5</sup> As such, they wield power and inspire horror both in the men of the book and the male narrative voice. Although Dorothy A. Stephens raises the question of the ventriloquized voice when she says, "[I]f The Faerie Queene does ally itself at times to a creativity that it identifies as feminine, we can no longer use the fact of its male authorship to justify our assumption that its speaking voice is purely masculine," she does note that this is not to say that the feminine triumphs despite Spenser's patriarchal plan or vision, nor does she deny that it is as part of such an institution that he speaks.<sup>6</sup> Though he strikes a balance with some of his characters, he overweights his pictorial depiction in favour of the foul, filthy, and disgusting hag. This overbalancing, combined with some of the feelings inspired by not only the "good" witches but the "bad" ones, leaves the reader with a negative, monitory impression of powerful or power-wielding women. Spenser does portray negative elements in his male characters (Guyon is discussed below). Archimago is an enchanter, but he fails to raise the same emotional reaction as Spenser's enchantresses, and Duessa dominates the epic more than the alleged arch-villain. The Palmer and Genius wield magical powers, and in fact eclipse Guyon in his own story, but again, the images associated with them, whilst potent, are muted and free of real horror.<sup>7</sup>

Condemnation is saved for Acrasia.

Gloriana is never condemned. She is the eponymous Queen of Faerie for the sake of whom all action supposedly takes place. But as Cavanagh observes, she is an uncertain presence. She appears in a vision, or a dream. Since she is not physical, the

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<sup>5</sup>As noted in the Introduction, this is an aspect of the work for which very little critical material exists.

<sup>6</sup>Dorothy A. Stephens, "Newes of devils': Feminine Sprights in Masculine Minds in The Faerie Queene," ELR 23 (1993): 369. She concerns herself with Alma, rather than with witches and hags.

<sup>7</sup>As critics have lavished much attention on Archimago, and little on the other two, I emphasise them rather than him, especially as they act in concert with, or concerted against, Acrasia.



encounter, if there really is one, is chaste. Physical contact cannot actually occur.

But the vision itself is erotic.<sup>8</sup> The Faerie Queene is ethereal, almost siren-like, in her demonstrations; she lays herself next to her chosen lover, entices him, and steals away with the morn, leaving Arthur as rapt and lost as any bewitched paramour. In this she is not unlike other otherworldly lovers in Arthurian literature; nor is she dissimilar to the lady to whom a knight devotes his courtly love.

The way in which Gloriana appears is reminiscent of the appearance of a succubus, though the poem remains unaware of this. She teases, tempts, and leaves with the night, leaving her lover in a sort of spent rapture, his potency temporarily taken away. This imagery recurs again and again in The Faerie Queene, usually in conjunction with an evil enchantress, though not always. Cavanagh believes that "most of the epic's malevolent female characters represent nightmares . . . Unlike virtuous women, who are often absent or in flight, evil females in the poem emerge tangible from the spirit/dream-world, using their physical presence to cloud the judgment and the virtues of the knights they encounter."<sup>9</sup> The three categories into which these evil female characters fall are witch, hag, and succubus. If Gloriana escapes the role of succubus, it is only because she does not cross the boundary into physicality. She remains beyond it, thus avoiding the nightmare of a woman becoming imperfect: real, powerful, and therefore threatening. However, imagistically she provides the contrast for those horrific women who do dare to cross the boundary into men's waking, marring dream by becoming nightmare.

Spenser sets up this opposition before he even introduces Gloriana. In the first canto of the first book, Errour is introduced almost immediately after Una. Una is "A louely Ladie" whiter than snow, but who modestly hides her beauty behind a veil, who trains along with her the lamb of innocence.<sup>10</sup> To reinforce the image, Spenser states

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<sup>8</sup>I.ix.13, 14.

<sup>9</sup>Cavanagh 44.

<sup>10</sup>I.i.4.



outright, "So pure an innocent, as that same lambe, / She was in life and euery vertuous lore. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Moreover, her purity and desirability are enhanced by her ancient and royal lineage. Spenser here demonstrates a class bias, or a representation of the Other as socially lower or inferior, not just morally. In this instance, Una is set up as "higher," but elsewhere in the text witches either are or are perceived to be lower than the knights of the high culture who combat them. Though Errour herself lurks in the woods which later centuries would populate with big bad wolves and other monsters, hags and witches in The Faerie Queene consistently are located in subterranean passages, at the end of labyrinthine journeys, and in "gloomy hollow glen." <sup>12</sup> Knights either discover themselves in or look out from towers. Hags are "common," as we will see with the witch who creates snowy Florimell and her Caliban-like son. That woman dares to be poor, or, as Spenser phrases it, lives in "wilfull want, all careless of her needes." <sup>13</sup> Duessa is doubly foul because she adopts a beautiful form and the behaviour of a higher culture than the one she was born to as the daughter of Deceit and Shame. Her horror would be even greater to a Renaissance audience, used to believing that inner, innate and natural qualities are manifest in a person's exterior appearance. Throughout the time span covered by this study, an increasing number of sumptuary laws and laws against transvestite women reflect this dis-ease.

Whereas a few fragmented phrases describing her innocence, skin and clothes suffice for Una's description, Spenser demonstrates that his "ambivalence to the lower representation of the lower strata (of the body, of literature, of place)" <sup>14</sup> manifests in a horrified fascination with his female monsters. Within ten stanzas of Una's

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<sup>11</sup>I.i.5.

<sup>12</sup>III.vii.6.

<sup>13</sup>III.vii.6.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986) 4.

introduction, Errour enters in: "[h]alfe like a serpent horrible displaide, / But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine, / Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain." <sup>15</sup> In contrast to Una's purity, Errour is mother of a hellish, deformed brood. Worse, she is apparently the sole parent. They creep into and out of her mouth, showing again the danger of a woman's mouths and the conflation between errant speech and errant sexuality. The fact that she attacks topsy-turvy, with "her hideous taile / About her cursed head" underlines the conflation, as does the fact that Red Crosse is caught in her coils. <sup>16</sup>

Acrasia is another "nightmare." Because she transforms men into animals, robbing them both of masculinity and humanity, she is most often compared to Circe, the wise but dangerous maga in The Odyssey. Like Circe, Acrasia is said to have a beautiful voice (though Guyon does not give her the opportunity to use it). As in the Odyssey, animals in The Faerie Queene are returned to the shapes of men. Like Odysseus, the Palmer (not Guyon) uses a gift from Hermes to overcome Acrasia's powers. But there are substantial differences between Homer's Circe and Spenser's Acrasia. The first lies in the nature of the beasts. Circe's beasts fawn upon Odysseus and his men; Acrasia's attack Guyon and the Palmer, forcing the Palmer to use his rod to overcome them, just as he overcomes the hostile waves. Secondly, Odysseus "conquers" Circe by being immune to her magic, whereby Circe knows him to be the foretold Ithacan; Guyon gives Acrasia no chance to fend for or explain herself. Thirdly, Odysseus and his men spend a full year with Circe, and upon their leaving, she outlines the course that the heroes must follow if ever they are to see their homeland again. Whatever wisdom Acrasia may possess (and Spenser, despite the fact that he portrays Acrasia as a monster, yet grants her such feelings as may have redeemed her, given the opportunity) is left unknown, as Guyon in a fit of violence and intemperance utterly destroys the Bower of Bliss. Lastly, and most importantly,

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<sup>15</sup>I.i.14.

<sup>16</sup>I.i.16, 18.

both in terms of comparison and symbolism, Acrasia does not possess Circe's cup and rod. Throughout Renaissance Circean portrayal, the cup or chalice in which she mixes her drugged brew is often foremost.<sup>17</sup> Also prominent is the rod with which she strikes men to turn them to animals. Acrasia has neither; or at least not at the time when Guyon encounters her. As Spenser very carefully introduces these very implements into the descriptions of other magicians, this must be a deliberate omission. And the net in which Guyon and the Palmer trap the lovers is a close relation of the net Vulcan used to entangle his errant wife. We thus finish with Venus, rather than Circe.

The destruction of Acrasia and the Bower of Bliss is anticlimactic after the buildup the maga has received. Spenser speaks of

The vile Acrasia, that with vaine delightes,  
And idle pleasures in her Bowre of Blisse,  
Does charme her louers, and the feeble sprightes  
Can call out of the bodies of fraile wightes:  
Whom then she does transform to monstrous hewes,  
And horribly misshapes with vgly sightes . . .<sup>18</sup>

Amavia describes Acrasia's bower, and furthers the image of Acrasia as extremely powerful.<sup>19</sup> Acrasia's powers of enchantment are so complete that men know neither themselves nor their beloved, as Amavia finds to her pain.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Acrasia's strength is supposedly so great that the Palmer has to seek out the Faerie Court for help against her. Certainly the number of beasts which guard the bower testify to Acrasia's powers of transformation. Or do they? Other literature, such as Whitney's A Choice of Emblemes, demonstrates the contemporary belief that the men who were

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<sup>17</sup>See Judith Yarnall, Transformations of Circe (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1994). Also Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions," Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>18</sup>II.v.27.

<sup>19</sup>II.i.52.

<sup>20</sup>II.i.54.



transformed by Circe and her analogues were partially transformed by their own faults and lusts; given the choice, they stay in their animal shapes.<sup>21</sup> In Caroline masque this is also true; and Grillus even in Spenser decides to remain a hog.<sup>22</sup> Guyon's book is devoted to temperance; bearing this in mind, Acrasia may be only a catalyst whereby weak souls turn themselves to beasts. There are hints that this indeed the case. Acrasia is alluring, true, and has wrought havoc; however, in a book where so many villains, male and female, are portrayed unambiguously as ugly and unsympathetic both outside and in, Spenser gives Acrasia some sympathetic qualities. Looking down upon Cymochles, she sighs, "as if his case she rew'd"; likewise, she is portrayed as suffering from Cupid's arrows herself--she is "stong". This suggests that she herself is not in control of the situation, but serves some other unnamed power. This power could be Venus, goddess of love; it could also be interpreted as the male, patriarchal vision which creates her, renders her mute, and overturns her because of her gross physicality.

Acrasia's silence is extremely curious. As discussed in the introduction, women's speech and women's desire to speak in early modern literature and thought are conflated with women's unruliness and lust. Silence is a desirable feature, and does not sit well with the image of Acrasia as an ultimate threat. If she were, she should have Duessa's powers of verbal beguilement. Either someone--unnamed and undefined--knew Guyon could not vanquish a full villain and gagged Acrasia, or Acrasia should be reckoned an ambiguous figure, like the Queene of Faerie. The alternative is to count Acrasia as the silent mistress addressed in love poetry, always willing but never present or speaking. In this case her very presence would be an insult to Guyon, a defilement of dream beyond bearing. However, none of these roles gives Acrasia herself any sort of direct agency; she remains passive. Viewing Acrasia

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<sup>21</sup>As cited in Yarnall 103.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Jennifer A. McGowan, "Critical Imagery: The Role of the Pagan in the Caroline Masque," M.A. diss., U of Wales Bangor, 1994.

as a catalyst can also be justified by II.v.27 as quoted above. Her power is over those spirits who are "feeble"; she can call them out only of "fraile" men. Only these men become her beasts.

Temperance provides the muscle for the destruction of incontinence. Yet in Guyon's actions, violent to the extreme, temperance becomes its opposite. As Yarnall observes, "Guyon's razing of the Bower also destroys the allegorical framework of book 2. . . .Guyon's incendiary fit amounts to a tacit . . . admission on Spenser's part that classical ethics cannot adequately contain or address the realities of human passion and need."<sup>23</sup> Britomart's easy defeat of Guyon also underlines his weakness and lack of prowess.

Which means, ironically, that Temperance is exactly the sort of weak and feeble soul who is subject to Acrasia's power. Guyon is deeply tempted by the nymphs in the fountain; he fears his own evil Genius. If Acrasia had been allowed a voice in the confrontation scene, or had been allowed her props (her herbs ("weedes") and cup), perhaps not even the Palmer's rod could have saved Guyon from Cymochles' fate. The strength of feeling Guyon suffers is also underlined by Yarnall: "Guyon is only a voyeur to this experience of bliss, yet he reacts to it with a passion of destruction that shows he has been deeply stirred . . . we most fear what we most desire. Guyon's excessive violence is that of someone threatened at his core. . . .In destruction he achieves the release that he has denied himself."<sup>24</sup> However, he does retain what Cymochles and those like him lose—the capability to remain active and dominant. Guyon in this scene never undergoes the spent, post-coital-like rapture that other knights experience.

By chaining Acrasia, Guyon has doomed himself to a life in which he, unlike Britomart, will never achieve his objective. Acrasia may be led away entrapped in adamant; but others magicians in the Faerie Queene escape such bonds,

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<sup>23</sup>Yarnall 140.

<sup>24</sup>Yarnall 139-40.



so there is no reason to suppose Acrasia will not. Vulcan eventually frees Venus from his net. Likewise, Acrasia's seneschal is upset, but not vanquished. Guyon's evil Genius escapes. And so new monsters may breed, and a new bower form.

Since Acrasia never speaks, she never prophesies or advises. Guyon, unlike Odysseus, is not told the next steps he needs to take. He will not therefore be able to speak to the spirits of the dead, thereby showing his mastery of death, as all true epic heroes must. He will not speak to Tiresias, the blind prophet--the hermaphrodite, man and woman both, and thus the heir to the magical chalice, the vessel in which opposites meet and merge.

Just as Gloriana/Elizabeth has the sieve as her symbol, so do magicians have the chalice, and often the rod. In The Faerie Queene, enchantresses of all sorts wield rods and hold chalices; however, their double-sided nature, which should be manifest in their implements and actions, is quite literally split into two separate beings. Although powerless when Guyon encounters her, Amavia testifies that, when she encountered Acrasia, the maga used her magic cup to great effect: "With cup thus charmd, him parting she deceiu'd" (II.i.55). Her cup has migrated to her double.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe,

To mention witches . . . is to be reminded once again of the traditional (patriarchally defined) association between creative women and monsters. In projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them.<sup>25</sup>

Though speaking of the nineteenth century, Gilbert and Gubar situate their doubles in a tradition which starts as far back as Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, whose heroine becomes beautiful and docile only after her ravening will has been fed in full. To re-work Gilbert and Gubar's assertion to include male writers, whereas women writers create dark doubles to haunt their heroines and their writing, male writers create light doubles who pale behind the strength--literal, literary, and imagistic--of the dark

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<sup>25</sup>Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (London: Yale UP, 1984) 79.



women. The difference in emphasis signifies a different kind of dis-ease, or a relocation of it. Successful incorporation of the dark into the light is not an issue in Spenser, however. The dark doubles must be defeated, destroyed like the Bower of Bliss, enchained in unbreakable bonds by the conquering knights—even though one of those knights is female. Their existence, or the threat thereof, cannot be dismissed from the mind or the poem, however. Male anxiety manifests not only in hags like Duessa who mask their essential evil behind beauty, but also in "troublesome" imagery associated with the light doubles in The Faerie Queene.

Acrasia's magical counterpart, the "good witch" of the first two books, is Fidelia. "Fidelia," whilst it has connotations of fidelity, is the Latin word for an earthen vessel or pot. Fidelia herself is an odd mixture of boon and bane, almost a sinister figure in Celia's house:

She was araied all in lilly white,  
 And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,  
 With wine and water fild vp to the light,  
 In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold,  
 That horroure made to all, that did behold;  
 But she no whit did chaunge her constant mood:  
 And in her other hand she fast did hold  
 A booke, that was both signd and seald with blood,  
 Wherein darker things were writ, hard to be understood.<sup>26</sup>

The Christian symbolism behind the wine and water in the chalice is obvious; again, opposites meet and merge. In this union is the Serpent, itself a duality. On one hand, the Serpent is the tempter in the garden; but on the other, it stands for eternity and wisdom. Elizabeth herself in the Rainbow portrait would have the serpent of wisdom and prudence upon her sleeve. J.E. Cirlot states that "Alchemists also saw in the serpent an illustration of 'the feminine in Man' or his 'humid essence', relating the reptile to Mercury . . . as the androgynous god who . . . was doubtless endowed with a tendency towards both good and evil."<sup>27</sup> As a symbol of the feminine, the serpent

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<sup>26</sup>I.x.13.

<sup>27</sup>J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Routledge, 1981) 290.

would rest easily in the chalice, which is also often used as a female symbol (complementing the male rod). The fact that Spenser genders the serpent masculine ("himself") underlines the darker, diabolic aspect. Simultaneously, its resting in the chalice symbolises a meeting of opposites. Fidelia's book is written in and locked by blood, which both hides and explains the higher mysteries. Women's tie with blood has always been mysterious to men; menses were often ingredients in spells, usually "dark" ones. Yet Fidelia is quite clearly angelic, and Redcrosse needs her teaching, though it be "hard to be understood." As woman and Anima, wisdom to Redcrosse's action, Fidelia is undismayed by her accoutrements, which are horrible to the male (and this includes the narrative) eye. Male perceptions of female power tinge even the good with a diabolic "horror made to all." The serpent was Mercury's; Mercury resurfaced in medieval and renaissance magic as Hermes Trismegistus. Fidelia is an acknowledged maga, and one without whose aid the knight will never succeed.

Acrasia and Fidelia neither use nor carry a rod, which furthers the parallel between them. Fidelia carries her book; Acrasia has no other physical instrument. The Palmer has usurped her rod, and therefore breaks her power, at least temporarily. The sexual overtones are obvious.

Aside from the phallic symbolism involved, Cirlot notes that the wand's "significance derives from the magic power attributed to it, which in turn derives from the concept of every stick or wand as a straight line, embodying implications of direction and intensity" (363). After drinking from Circe's potion, her rod intensifies men's weaknesses, and they become beasts.

There is one person in the Bower who possesses both rod and cup--Genius. Genius is Acrasia's seneschal, and Guyon's alter ego, who as has been observed vanishes after being upset. Genius here is a curious cross between Bacchus and Circe, and as such in many ways prefigures Milton's Comus, himself an ambiguous figure:

With diuerse flowres he daintily was deckt,  
And strowed round about, and by his side,  
A mighty Mazer bowle of wine was set,



As if it had to him been sacrificide;  
 Wherwith all newcome guests he gratified:  
 So did he eke Sir Guyon passing by:  
 But he his idle curteisie defide.  
 And overthrew his bowle disdainfully;  
 And broke his staffe, with which he charmed semblants sly.<sup>28</sup>

The phallic staff is both threatened and utilised by Duessa and Cambina, who form another duet, and one which does not even lightly disguise its sexual overtones and tensions. No knight seems ever able to suppress Duessa completely; no knight or barrier can stand before Cambina's power. Duessa, though made beautiful by her magic arts, is revealed to be a hideous hag, like those the Malleus Maleficarum describes, and an exemplum of those old women who in England would suffer through witchcraft trials and often die. Cambina, on the other hand, is likened unto angels. Her beauty is true and pure. Yet both women are undoubtedly magicians, dark and light, and operate in similar wise--not with bell, book, and candle, but with chalice and rod. In the first book, for instance, Duessa, riding upon the beast which hopes to devour the unlucky gallant,

took . . . her angrie cup,  
 Which still she bore, replete with magicke artes;  
 Death and despeyre did many thereof sup,  
 And secret poyson through their inner parts,  
 Th'eternal bale of heauie wounded harts;  
 Which after charmes and some enchantments said,  
 She lightly sprinkled on his weaker parts;  
 Therewith his sturdie courage soone was quayd, .  
 And all his senses were with suddeine dread dismayd.

So downe he fell before the cruell beast. . .<sup>29</sup>

The language in this passage is unabashedly sexual, as is Duessa herself. Duessa's victim provides the rod--he is sprinkled "on his weaker parts," loses all potency, and falls, literally emasculated. Men's "rods," though the source of phallic power, are also vulnerable physically and, where the strong or unruly woman is concerned,

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<sup>28</sup>II.xii.49. For a discussion of Comus as both Hermetic and Circean figure, see McGowan.

<sup>29</sup>I.viii.14, 15.



metaphorically. Part of the anxiety generated in this passage is that the reader may find such domination erotic, though it is perpetrated by a villainess (or perhaps because of this). This eroticism would be a locus of dis-ease, for Duessa not only represents but rides the devouring mouth, uncontrolled appetite, the whore of Babylon.

Cambina, though she uses surprisingly similar tactics, is a "good witch." She comes partially from Gloriana's realm, whence perhaps she derives her goodness. Spenser tells us,

Thereto she learned was in Magicke leare,  
And all the artes, which subtill wits discover,  
Hauing therein bene trained many a yeare,  
And well instructed by the Fay her mother,  
That in the same she farre excels all other.<sup>30</sup>

Cambina's mind is "subtill"; she does not lack wit. Yet the term "Magicke" is unambiguous, as is the imagery associated with her:

In her right hand a rod of peace she bore,  
About the which two Serpentes weren wound.  
Entrayled mutually in louely lore,  
And by the tailes together firmly bound,  
And both were with one oliue garland crownd,  
Like to the rod which Maias sonne doth wield,  
Wherewith the hellish fiends he doth confound.  
And in her other hand a cup she hild,  
The which was with Nepenthe to the brim vpild.<sup>31</sup>

Nepenthe, the gods' drink, is here conflated with Lethe, the water from which the dead drink to forget their former lives. Cambina also holds a caduceus, symbol of wisdom, Hermes' staff. It is a rod of peace, unconquerable, and it calms the fighting beasts within the lists as the Palmer's staff calmed Acrasia's: At last arriuing by the listes side / Shee with her rod did softly smite the raile, / Which straight did ope. . . .<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>III.iii.40. Interestingly, this passage also prefigures Milton's Comus.

<sup>31</sup>III.iii.42.

<sup>32</sup>III.iii.46.

Two stanzas later, Cambina uses her rod again, and again the image is powerfully sexually charged, with overtones of domination:

But when as all might nought with them prevaile,  
 Shee smote them lightly with her powrefull wand.  
 Then suddenly as if their hearts did faile,  
 Their wrathfull blades downe fell out of their hand,  
 And they like men astonisht still did stand.  
 Thus whilest their minds were doubtfully distraught,  
 And mighty spirites bound with mightier band,  
 Her golden cup to them for thirste she raught,  
 Whereof full glad for thirst, ech drunk an harty draught. . . .<sup>33</sup>

Cambina portrays reason, but sweet reason, reason bent on unison and benison rather than on destruction. The picture, however, recalls the episode with Duessa described above. The main difference is that Duessa uses the chalice to enthrall her victim; Cambina uses the rod, upon which Cambell and Triamond lose their fighting potency and control over their weapons. Then a drink from the female cup of wisdom and forgetfulness produces the two strongest friends in The Faerie Queene.

Not all magic in The Faerie Queene is hermetic, however. The powers used by both Radigund, the Amazon queen, and Britomart, the knight of Chastity and also the most powerful and prevalent knight in the poem, are divine. Not only divine--they are female.

Britomart is explicitly described as one of Elizabeth's forbears. Though Spenser in his explication of The Faerie Queene mentions only Gloriana and Belphoebe as Elizabethan parallels, Britomart is stronger and plays a much more central role in the work. Defeating most of the other questing knights and accomplishing tasks which the men fail to achieve, Britomart is more Elizabeth than Belphoebe. A paradox is created by the fact that her main quest is for a true and loyal husband, Justice/Artegall, but as Strong points out, Elizabethan images are meant to be read and re-read. Elizabethans were capable of believing two contrary things simultaneously. Just as Venus can be Virgo, and a sieve both strain and retain, so can

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<sup>33</sup>III.iii.48.



Britomart both marry and stay single and virginal. And, of course, there may always be a residual authorial hope, however unlikely the reality, that Elizabeth herself may continue the Tudor dynasty.

Britomart, as a virago dressed as a male knight whose ultimate destiny is as a mother, proves a problematic figure. Mary Villeponteaux observes,

In keeping with her role as exemplar of Elizabeth's special virtue, chastity, Britomart initially embodies a complete authority, a power not found in any other knight . . . Britomart is literally invincible because she wields . . . a powerful phallic symbol that at the same time connotes her woman's chastity. But immediately an uneasiness arises . . . and that authoritative Britomart . . . is displaced, her invulnerability questioned when she is wounded by Malecasta's knights in the Castle Joyous. . . . She is the only knight in The Faerie Queene who suffers such a rapid downfall.<sup>34</sup>

Her masculine lance renders her invulnerable, though the male knights are rendered vulnerable by their masculinity. Since Britomart controls male sexuality, it cannot mount an assault upon her own. Or, alternatively, a powerful and certain phallogentric power protects female chastity.

This latter fits in with the fact that transvestite Britomart is not self-defined, but created by the male enchanter Merlin. However, this too has its problems. Villeponteaux posits, "Merlin's enchanted glass, through which Britomart sees and eventually becomes a powerful knight, is immediately associated with a phallic structure that has proved fragile, a tower of glass that might initially seem to embody authority but that collapses easily as a result of its own fallibility."<sup>35</sup> Several themes are embodied in this excerpt. Britomart comes into being through an instrument of the male gaze, and is defined in her roles (as knight and as future wife and mother) by the possessor of that gaze. However, that constructed authority shatters like the

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<sup>34</sup>Mary Villeponteaux, "Displacing Feminine Authority in The Faerie Queene," Studies in English Literature 35.1 (1995): 54.

<sup>35</sup>Villeponteaux 62.



tower. If one extrapolates to include Merlin, what might one say about his patriarchal, fatherland-making magic?

"Spenser's imaginative rendering of power . . . as the fallen tower of glass," thinks Villeponteaux, "suggests the threat posed to patriarchal society by Britomart's adoption of . . . masculine identity. . . ." <sup>36</sup> Britomart poses a threat to men: she can shatter them, literally unseat them. However, despite the fact that her disguise is conceived by a man, it is so successful that it deceives a woman, who falls in love with Britomart. Amoret, too, believes Britomart to be male. Lurking behind these scenes, especially the first, is the fear that one unruly woman spreads contagion. Just as Duessa seduces men, so Britomart has the capacity to seduce women. Villeponteaux pursues a similar line of thought when she states, "Britomart's ability to don a masculine identity and the authority it confers . . . is potentially subversive in what it suggests about the nature of power and authority—that they are constructs that can be adopted, even by a woman, rather than innate and 'natural' traits of maleness." <sup>37</sup> Merlin constructs Britomart. But Merlin's tower falls. If Merlin (who traditionally engineers Arthur's conception) is undone, what then of Gloriana, a descendant of Britomart and Arthurian legend? The dis-ease engendered here comes from the potential that women may start constructing the construct themselves. Spenser portrays Radigund, Britomart's ultimate enemy, as a woman who tried to do just that.

Radigund, the Amazon queen, thinks ill of men. Women rule and defend her city; the city itself is named after its queen. In an absolutely classic case of inversion (or misrule in its sense (Spenser implies) of bad governance), Radigund sets men to doing traditionally women's chores. When she defeats Artegall,

Amongst them all she placed him most low,  
And in his hand a distaffe to him gae,

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<sup>36</sup>Villeponteaux 62.

<sup>37</sup>Villeponteaux 64-65.

That he thereon should spin both flax and tow;  
 A sordid office for a mind so braue.  
 So hard it is to be a woman's slaue.<sup>38</sup>

Spenser, in the fifth book, is guilty not only of believing but constructing contrary concepts. At the same time that Artegall is suffering under what after all is only women's normal lot (though we see none of the major female characters, not even Amavia, spinning), he admits that it is a "sad office" for a brave mind to be doing. Radigund and Britomart both have brave minds, so it would also be a crime for them to spin. In the last line ambivalence creeps in again, for it echoes love poetry, in which the man sometimes willingly sets himself up as a slave to his mistress. In courtly love service of the lady is theoretically absolute and unquestioned. Radigund becomes not only a double for Britomart, but in some sense a substitute. Spenser does not hold back from chastising Artegall, who Spenser feels makes a mockery of the love contract. Artegall "to her [Radigund] yeelded of his owne accord ; / Yet was he justly damned by the doome / Of his owne mouth, that spake so warelesse word, / To be her thrall, and seruice her afford."<sup>39</sup> Artegall is damned because with his own mouth he cedes to hers. Already struck in the "thigh" (V.v.9.9), probably a Biblical term for groin, his ceding to Radigund takes the light of a seduction, and one to which he went willingly. Cavanagh observes, "Nightmarish women largely attempt to seduce men away from the field and away from virtue [itself inherently a masculine word], using sex as their primary weapon. Their actions thus merge the early meaning of 'seduce'--persuading a soldier to desert his allegiance or battle--with its subsequent sexual connotation (OED)."<sup>40</sup>

Amazons are a type much used in the querelle des femmes, and one which will be touched on more in discussing Joan of Arc. Lisa Jardine states that the threat

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<sup>38</sup>V.v.23.

<sup>39</sup>V.v.17.

<sup>40</sup>Cavanagh 45.



"of the Amazon/virago is generalised 'rejection of her sex', a strangeness which travesties nature. The scold is a disturbingly persuasive possibility; the man-woman, an outsider and a sensationalised freak."<sup>41</sup> Extrapolating from this, Radigund's behaviour should distance both herself and the threat she poses. It should also, however, distance Britomart, and this does not happen. By supporting Britomart, Spenser must allow Radigund power to disturb, so that her defeat by Britomart and Britomart's subsequent revocation of the powers which Radigund claim ring more truly.

Though she does wield power, and acts effectively as priestess of Isis and disciple of the moon, in The Faerie Queene Spenser does not use Radigund as a witch *per se*. Nor is she a hag. This fact leads to Artegall's undoing, for from her behaviour he supposed her to be so. However, when he removes her helm, "He saw his senses strange astonishment, / A miracle of natures goodly grace . . . Like as the Moone in foggie winters night, / Doth seeme to be her selfe, though darkened be her light."<sup>42</sup> Radigund is both the moon itself and its devotee. She carries a holy shield: "As the faire moone in her most full aspect, / That to the Moone it must be in each respect" (V.v.3). In the unlikely case readers miss this comparison, in battle the shield suffers two blows: one takes it to a waning half moon; and one reduces it to shatters, leaving only the new moon. As we are told later, when Britomart visits Isis' temple, "Isis doth the moon portend" (V.vii.4). Isis is the Egyptian equivalent of Hecate, goddess of magic, as well.

To defeat Radigund, Britomart must in essence become her. Whilst sleeping in Isis' temple, Britomart finds herself dreaming of her transition from maiden-priestess to goddess-mother, Isis herself, conceiving a lion of a crocodile. Where Radigund has her shield, a chalice parallel, Britomart/Isis quells the waves and the beasts, much like the Palmer did, with the use of Isis' rod. Hence Britomart enters the

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<sup>41</sup>Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters (Sussex: Harvester, 1983) 105.

<sup>42</sup>V.v.12.



realm of the enchantresses in reverse--she steps into the dream realm and into symbolic power. Fortunately, that power echoes that of her own lance of invulnerability. Instead of keeping this vision to herself, however, and acting on her own behalf, she turns to the priests to have her dream analysed; they tell her she is to free Artegall, the crocodile. The lion will be their son (and one should not forget that Elizabeth called herself a "lion's cub").

Spenser does not, particularly in this episode, use his unruly women to advocate change, or even find an outlet for suppression. Britomart avoids Radigund's "errors." Following the advice the priests gave her, she frees Artegall, and makes him not only her lord, but lord of the realm as well. She rejects her own sovereignty and has all of the captive knights swear fealty to Artegall. By doing this Britomart proves herself a typical, even archetypal, woman of the patriarchal establishment. As Constance Jordan notes, "the rules of conventional marriage [which is what Britomart has fought for] required the woman to assume the voice of her husband and be his echo, to be masculine to the extent that she identified herself with the interests of men, a condition that is emblemized by a Venus or a woman bearing arms."<sup>43</sup>

Artegall goes forth on his mission and Britomart stays faithfully behind, worrying at the window. But she cannot truly leave the life she has lived. In Britomart's case at least, her run of unruliness has changed her, and "She part[s] thence, her anguish to appease."<sup>44</sup> She falls victim to a double bind. She feels she cannot fit in with either of the roles men have designed for her--wife or Venus armata. Her anguish is an unresolved dis-ease.

The poem's dis-ease with this entire episode is also unresolved. When Spenser tries to condemn the city of women, he must at the last reverse himself:

Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,  
When they haue shaken off the shamefast band,<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 224.

<sup>44</sup>V.vii.45.

With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,  
 T'obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,  
 That then all rule and reason they withstand,  
 To purchase a licentious libertie,  
 But vertuous women wisely vnderstand,  
 That they were borne to base humilitie,  
 Vnlesse the heauens them lift to lawfull souerainitie.<sup>46</sup>

Elizabeth in her guise as Cynthia, the moon, is lifted by the heavens to her sovereignty, but so, too, is Radigund, also the moon. A possible monitory aspect of this is that Radigund, like Elizabeth, is single and childless. Britomart, Radigund's successor, rejects the sovereignty and grants it to her lord Artegall. That does not avoid the problem, however, for Britomart leaves her home. In addition, her destiny is as the mother of the line that begets Elizabeth I--and we arrive back at the start of the problem.

Maternity is problematic throughout the epic. Cavanagh believes,

Instead of the treachery associated with female genitalia, maternity and vulnerability take center stage. Feminine deception can be warded off . . . if women are given nothing to hide behind. Such complete female nudity diverts the viewer's attention of the power wielded by the women [goddesses, etc.].<sup>47</sup>

"Nothing to hide behind" equates to a definition of self created by Self rather than imposed by Other. Britomart does not have this; Merlin created her. Radigund does. We have already seen that in Error maternity can be monstrous, and the imagery associated with her is sexual. Spenser depicts other hags as loyal mothers, but though his language may soften and vacillate, it remains clear to the reader that these powerful, magical women are monsters.

In the first Canto, Duessa visits Night. After a long, subterranean journey, she reaches the place

Where griesly *Night*, with visage deadly sad,  
 That *Phoebus* chearefull face durst neuer vew,

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<sup>45</sup>Compare this band (modesty) with the band Cambina places around the knights' hearts above.

<sup>46</sup>V.v.25.

<sup>47</sup>Cavanagh 30.



And in a foule blacke pitchie mantle clad,  
 She findes forth comming from her darksome mew,  
 Where she all day did hide her hated hew. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Duessa moves Night to "compassion": "Her feeling speeches some compassion moued / In hart, and chaunge in that great mothers face: / Yet pittie in her hart was neuer proued / Till then."<sup>49</sup> Night is characterised by the fact that she has given birth, and is moved to act for her children's sakes. The wise child might know her parent, but Duessa's talent for dissimulation and the air with which she wears her beauty stymies Night, who cannot identify her till Duessa confesses her identity. Night responds as a matriarch:

Then bowing downe her aged backe, she kist  
 The wicked witch, saying ; In that faire face  
 The false resemblance of Deceipt, I wist,  
 Did closely lurke ; yet so true-seeming grace  
 It carried, that I scarce in darksome place  
 Could it discerne, though I the mother bee  
 Of falshood, and root of *Duessaes* race.  
 O welcome child, whom I haue longd to see,  
 And now haue seene vnwares.<sup>50</sup>

Duessa incites Night, with her iron wagon (besides being black, iron is traditionally lethal to the fey) to mount to the upper air. Her woman's tongue begets trouble for the heroes by appealing to a mother's nature. Duessa's sirenic qualities are redirected, rather than suppressed, when she deals with her own sex, and Duessa's actions highlight the danger of awakening unruly emotions in otherwise quiescent women.

The witch who creates Snowy Florimell acts for similar reasons. She is a hag, and is never given a name, taking her identity only from the fact that she is a witch and mother. In addition to living in darkness and poverty, she chooses "solitarie to abide, / Far from all neighbours, that her deuilish deedes / And hellish arts from people she might hide, / And hurt far off vnknowne, whom euer she enuide"

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<sup>48</sup>I.v.20.

<sup>49</sup>I.v.24.

<sup>50</sup>I.v.27.



(III.vii.6). Like the three witches in *Macbeth*, she lives apart from men; unlike them, and unlike most of the other witches this study will discuss, she does not cross the boundaries into what Spenser interprets as the waking world, and what is set up as a male world. Most occult witches are liminal, living on borders or transgressing them. One of the things which makes Duessa so powerful and awe-inspiring is that she crosses as many boundaries as she can find: between class, between upper and lower air, between beauty and ugliness, between cantos . . . the list goes on. The first sin that the witch who creates Snowy Florimell commits is that she lives apart. She shuns her neighbours and fellow man--in essence, she commits the sin of privacy. The irony here lies in the fact that in so doing she fulfills the role that society and witch-accusers sought to inflict upon those they accused: unwanted, dangerous, isolated, outcast. Like Sycorax, she dwells apart with her son; but no Prospero comes to rob her of what little is hers.

Her first sin against Florimell, again, echoes witch trials in reverse. Often the alleged witch believes her accusers to have stinted of hospitality, charity, or fair trade. Florimell comes seeking charity and aid. However, the witch believes her to be devil-guided, "vnwelcomed, vnsought."<sup>51</sup> Florimell wins her over, as Duessa does Night, so that "that vile Hag, all were her whole delight / In mischiefe, was much moued at so pitteous sight."<sup>52</sup> The witch then thinks Florimell a goddess or demi-goddess, and wants to worship her "with humble spright ; / T'adore thing so diuine as beauty, were but right."<sup>53</sup> She seems to have made steps towards moral reclamation, and Spenser endorses them. However, immediately after that approval, Spenser calls her "that wicked woman" (III.vii.12, line 1); paradoxically, he acknowledges that the witch only goes "backe to her wicked leares" (III.vii.21) to restore her son to health (or rather, reason). Her evil action is an act of creation, one which would fit in with

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<sup>51</sup>III.vii.8.

<sup>52</sup>III.vii.9. Delighting in mischief prefigures Middleton's Heccat.

<sup>53</sup>III.vii.11.

Dorothy Stephens' observation on creativity being gendered female. However, there is no sense in which this jeopardises a male voice, for a woman is being created to ease a man's anguish and fill his desires, as in the love poetry Hobby discusses. There may be a certain irony in the fact that Snowy Florimell goes on to wreak havoc amongst men and then vanishes, disincorporate, as any dream not capable of functioning in the real world must, but the irony lies in an informed reader's mind, and not in the text. Conversely, Spenser laces his text with the horror created by those women who can function in the real world. The witch, by creating the snowy Florimell, falls into Gilbert and Gubar's description of the wicked queen: she is "a witch, an artist, an impersonator, a woman of almost infinite creative energy . . . wily, and self-absorbed as all artists traditionally are."<sup>54</sup>

Unlike Snow White's stepmother, however, both the witch and Night are mothers who act because of this. These Spenserian witches both support and deny Deborah Willis' theory of malevolent nurture.<sup>55</sup> Their maternity definitely influences their actions and encourages them; however, these "village-type" witches are not devalued, nor is their power. They are not subject to a greater power (i.e., Satan's). If one is to adapt Willis' theory, one must expand it to include being subject to a male-driven narrative, and to their sons' desires. Florimell is every bit as nebulous as her snowy double, and spends most of her time in flight, in neither one place nor the other.

Ate is another hag who comes from the depths to harry the heights. Like Night three cantos earlier, she is fetched and inspired by Duessa. As the daughter of Discord, she too enjoys stirring up trouble. Her appearance and methods are driven by pronounced opposition and ambivalence:

For she at first was borne of hellish brood,  
And by infernall furies nourished,

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<sup>54</sup>Gilbert and Gubar 38-39.

<sup>55</sup>Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).



That by her monstrous shape might easily be red.

Her face most fowle and filthy was to see,  
 With squinted eyes contrarie wayes intended,  
 And loathly mouth, vnmeete a mouth to bee,  
 That nought but gall and venim comprehended,  
 And wicked words that God and man offended:  
 Her lying tongue was in two parts diuided,  
 And both the parts did speake, and both contended ;  
 And as her tongue, so was her hart discided,  
 That neuer thought one thing, but double still was guided.

Als as she double spake, so heard she double,  
 With matchlesse eares deformed and distort . . .  
 And as her eares so eke her feet were odde,  
 And much vnlike, th'one long, the other short,  
 And both misplast ; that when th'one forward yode,  
 The other backe retired, and contrarie trode.

Likewise vnequall were her handes twaine,  
 That one did reach, the other pusht away . . .<sup>56</sup>

The first full stanza cited here concerns itself in the first instance with Ate's looks, establishing her quite firmly as a hag. Immediately afterwards, her deception of speech is dwelt upon, for longer than any other characteristic. The first part of Ate's unruliness lies in her speech, which is doubled, as every bit of her is. In this description Ate manifests as the epitome of The Faerie Queene's nightmare women. Whereas other women are split into light and dark doubles, Ate is her own double, and both halves are evil. Her speech leads her heart and the rest of her body; her appearance, hellish and fiendish, warns men of her nature.

However, Ate has more nightmare in store. For, like Duessa, whose ugliness is only discovered accidentally and whose beauty deceives even her progenitrix, Ate takes the face of a beautiful maiden. Spenser describes her transition into fit companion for the "fowle welfauord witch" Duessa thus:<sup>57</sup>

For though like withered tree, that wanteth iuyce,

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<sup>56</sup>IV.i.26-29.

<sup>57</sup>I.v.28.



She old and crooked were, yet now of late,  
 As fresh and fragrant as the floure deluce  
 She was become, by chaunge of her estate . . .<sup>58</sup>

Like Duessa, she impersonates a state higher than her own, as underlined by the reference to the royal fleur-de-lys, and flies about the higher air.

The beast who dwells beneath the altar, whom Arthur awakes and defeats in Book V, stays in her own dark, subterranean state. Her description, familiar by now, is of a monster with a maiden's face:

A huge great Beast it was . . . Horrible, hideous, and of hellish race . . .  
 For of a Mayd she had the outward face,  
 To hide the horreur, which did lurke behinde,  
 The better to beguile, whom she so fond did finde.<sup>59</sup>

However, this Beast's horreur is even greater than Duessa's and some of the other monsters', for her nether regions are not unified. They are as fragmented as any other woman's; in fact, more so, for she incorporates many beasts:

Therto the body of a dog she had,  
 Full of fell rauin and fierce greedinesse ;  
 A Lions clawes, with powre and rigour clad  
 To rend and teare, what so she can oppresse. . .<sup>60</sup>

The text goes on to note a dragon's tail and eagle's wings, summing her up as "foulnesse and deformity."<sup>61</sup> She is compared with the Erinyes and the Sphinx, horror figures. Dragon, eagle, and lion are often found as positive attributes, however—witness Britomart's son the lion. This monster's horror, especially for Prince Arthur, lies in the fact that this horrible woman is composed of animals which exemplify manly, war-like virtues. She has usurped them and taken them down to dwell with her in her hellish subterranean religion (one is reminded of Radigund and Isis—Isis was a goddess who dared the underworld).

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<sup>58</sup>IV.i.31.

<sup>59</sup>V.xi.23.

<sup>60</sup>V.xi.24.

<sup>61</sup>V.xi.25.

Arthur cannot let this kind of usurpation and monstrosity continue.

Unsurprisingly, his battle with her is sexually charged, and during it she takes on some occult, not to say diabolic, characteristics:

With that aloude she gan to bray and yell,  
And fowle blasphemous speaches forth did cast  
And bitter curses, horrible to tell . . .  
Tho with her huge long taile she at him strooke,  
That made him stagger, and stand halfe agast  
With trembling joynts, as he for errorr shooke ;  
Who nought was terrifide, but greater courage tooke.<sup>62</sup>

The beast casts forth "blasphemous speaches" like a spell, or summonation. She curses, underlining her diabolic potential.<sup>63</sup> His "errorr" is falling into the spell of her tail, having declawed her. "Tail" is sexual. His lack of strength, almost post-coital, recalls many earlier episodes where men are robbed of their prowess. However, he maintains his puissance, and strikes her tail with his mightier sword to vanquish her, and to drive his point home: "Vnder her wombe his fatall sword he thrust." He takes this action as she "prest on him."<sup>64</sup> Her womb, opened, vents all manner of filth and stench, again bringing up the ambivalence to maternity and female sexuality throughout the poem.

Ate, Night, Duessa, and the Beast are hellish fiends. The witch who creates Snowy Florimell practises "hellish arts." Acrasia is Circean, her practices evil. Radigund is an Amazon whose actions are beyond the comprehension of everyone (except the women of her city). Spenser attempts to make all of these women either non- or inhuman. Cavanagh believes that this is a containment policy. She states,

Even these demonic females' lack of humanity helps limit their threatening qualities. In The Faerie Queene, neither witches, hags, nor succubi claim human affiliations . . . Notably, these demonic origins

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<sup>62</sup>V.xi.28.

<sup>63</sup>For an analysis of cursing, see "Dost Call Me Witch?", "Those Tell-Tale Women," and "You Should be Women."

<sup>64</sup>V.xi.31.



contradict contemporary understandings of similar beings. The witchcraft treatises, for example, regularly describe witches as human women who have been lured away by the devil. Consequently, the epic's insistence that witches and hags are not human alerts us to the containment which helps shape Spenserian witches. Overwhelming as they often appear, they remain subject to the forces of virtue.<sup>65</sup>

Certainly, the unruly women in The Faerie Queene are not arguing for change. They do not even function to renew the society in which they appear, except as they are means whereby men or male-constructed heroines can demonstrate their superior strength. In this sense they are contained.

Spenser tries to create his witches as a type of wish fulfillment, just as Snowy Florimell is created. If only witches can dominate his knights, and his witches are not human, then no human women can dominate his knights. He would like his witches to rely on male agency, be that agent supernatural or Satanic. "Hence," argues Cavanagh, "witches' power largely remains 'male,' despite their own female forms."<sup>66</sup> In Spenser's portrayals, however, though much is subterranean or pertaining to the nether regions, not much is actually Satanic. "Hellish" and "foul" are favoured adjectives, but Spenser's classical allusions undermine any specifically Christian imagery. In the cases of Cambina and Radigund, power is handed down through female agents. Duessa stirs up other women to join the fray. It is not that witches' power remains "male." The treatment of the women and monsters in The Faerie Queene reflects a desire that all power remains male, whatever form it takes. This desire is not fulfilled, however, at least in a magical sense. The survival of the allegedly powerful male Archimago does not hold either the illicit promise or the threat of Duessa's potential return, and as such does not impinge upon the reader in the way that the women do.<sup>67</sup> His potency does not challenge theirs, or contain it.

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<sup>65</sup>Cavanagh 46.

<sup>66</sup>Cavanagh 47.

<sup>67</sup>As stated before, much work has been done on Archimago, and he is not therefore the focus of this chapter.

With the witches and enchantresses, there is no sense of closure. The witch who creates Snowy Florimell may still be living in her den in the gloaming. Duessa rides through so many stories and cantos it seems she cannot be repressed. Acrasia may escape her bonds--perhaps with the help of Genius. The "good" witches live on, and the dis-ease they engender in the reader is never resolved. Therefore, whereas the beasts may be fragmented in their destruction, allegorizing their control by anatomization, as Karen Newman would have it,<sup>68</sup> the actual women are not. Unlike the Snowy Florimell, they do not dissipate. They remain to trouble the text with their power and tenacity, and their capacity to function on both sides of the mirror.

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<sup>68</sup>Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 10.



CHAPTER 3. POWER AND SPEECH IN LYLY'S ENDIMION

*There lies none under the sun that knows what to make of the Man in the Moone.*  
*-Endimion, Prologue<sup>1</sup>*

John Lyly's Endimion (ca. 1585) in many ways grants women a larger audience than other plays of its time. Though the title character is male, Endimion himself spends most of the play asleep, dreaming of women, and a goodly number of women play key roles in the plot. All of these women are in some way disorderly or unruly: challenging established order, disobeying mistresses, influencing natural order, or ruling outright. They have voices which cannot be silenced, not even by royal command.<sup>2</sup> Wit and verbal facility characterise Endimion's women. They exercise temporal, spiritual, and occult power. With one major exception, women's speech is neither oppressed or repressed. This, combined with the fact that women are the primary agents of action and plot in a play which ends happily ever after, seems to argue for a society in which the balance of power, be it sexual or otherwise, does not lie solely in the hands of men. However, Lyly's ultimate purpose is not overly different from Spenser's. Though his female characters are not as consistently horrific as Spenser's, he does utilise stock types, or exempla, and each and every unruly woman is reconciled to society and court through the medium of marriage, which is, as Natalie Zemon Davis points out, one of the prime remedies for unruliness.<sup>3</sup> One of the areas of interest for the student of witches and unruly women lies in the fact that

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<sup>1</sup>R.W.Bond, ed., The Complete Works of John Lyly, vol. III, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), 17-80. All references to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>This is a neglected play—even David Bevington's edition notes it has not been overly studied in the twentieth century. (David Bevington, ed. Endymion: John Lyly, Revels ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996).) Women's voices within the play are an even more neglected topic.

<sup>3</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (London: Duckworth, 1975) 126.

despite Cynthia's claims of ultimate sovereignty, the hag Dipsas is the most powerful character in the play. An example of this occurs in the endings of the acts.

In the second act, Dipsas' last words, which end the act (but for a dumb show of Endimion's dream) are "come away, come away."<sup>4</sup> Though all acts end with a verbal direction for a group exit, only Dipsas and Cynthia, in acts two and five, respectively, end with an imperative, and only Dipsas differs from Lyly's usual method of ending an act in this play. Usually, one person states, "Let vs goe," and another responds, "I follow." Act four is a slight variation: Pythagoras assures Cynthia of undivided attention; Cynthia responds "Let vs goe in."<sup>5</sup> This suggests that during the course of the play at least, Dipsas is not as subject to the same structural rules which govern the other characters. Another feature of Endimion is that only act three ends with two men speaking (Eumenides to Geron). In the first act the interchange is between Tellus and Dipsas, with Dipsas the responder; in the second, Dipsas commands and Bagoa obeys without speaking. In the fourth act, no one speaks after Cynthia. In the fifth, Eumenides gives the response to Cynthia's command. Women therefore wield the power to close the action, as well as inspire it.

It is crucial to note that men do not commit the primary action in Endimion. Though the main part of Act III (scene four) is concerned with Eumenides' quest, and is therefore exclusively male, it is a quest undertaken at Cynthia's bidding and because of Tellus' jealousy and decision, which brings about Dipsas' action. In Endimion, women act; men react.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of personality, the sexes are not equal. The male characters in Endimion are neither universally desirable nor entirely sympathetic. Geron is wise but dull; Tophas is a fool; Corsites earnest but rude and not overly intelligent. The

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<sup>4</sup>II.iii.57.

<sup>5</sup>IV.iii.171.

<sup>6</sup>III.iii. is a comic relief interlude, in which Tophas, in his love for Dipsas, is set up as a snoring parallel to Endimion. Likewise are IV.ii. and V.ii. comic.



women, on the other hand, are to the last charming or enchanting. Flavia and Scintilla, the handmaids, are matches for the pages, as II.ii exemplifies; Cynthia of course inspires Endimion; Eumenides' love for Semele is what enables him to discover Endimion's cure; Bagoa weds Tophas; Tellus and Dipsas have two suitors each (Tellus Endimion and Corsites, Dipsas Tophas and Geron); and it can be read that Endimion and Floscula have, and have had, at least a Platonic relationship.<sup>7</sup>

There is a direct relationship between women's speech and their ability to enchant men or win their affections. In this alone they are sirens, witches. Ability to speak is also a measure of power. Those who control language control themselves and their reality. Women direct and control the action in the play; women are not involved in the comic episodes except as instigators, and as equals; they are unruly, disorderly--in Davis' words, they are "women on top."<sup>8</sup> Not a single domestic scene occurs in the entire play.

All the female characters, by dint of their various arcane or divine powers and their powers of speech, are to some extent witches. And it is Dipsas, the hag, the crone, who is the most powerful character in the play: she not only commits the action around which the play moves, the ensorcelment of Endimion, but she is beloved by fool (Tophas) and wise man (Geron) alike.<sup>9</sup> Despite Cynthia's allegation of Dipsas' ultimate lack of power, Dipsas proves more powerful, drawing down the moon from its course.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. IV.iii.149-54; V.iii.196-97.

<sup>8</sup>Davis, "Women on Top," Society and Culture in Early Modern France 124-51. Though the book focusses on France overall, this particular essay, as noted in the introduction, is not restricted to discussion of French women, and discusses Englishwomen frequently.

<sup>9</sup>Although Tophas' desire proves transient and untrue, and his ultimate statement of a wife, "so shee be a wench I care not" (V.iii.279-80) demonstrates his lack of discernment, Dipsas was still his first choice, though he ends up with her apprentice.

<sup>10</sup>Many have spent measureless effort trying to link Endimion directly to Elizabethan politics. That particular allegory is not useful in this context. Whether the characters aside from Cynthia in the play are more or less physically "real" is not as important as that they have a literary and symbolic existence. The play and its imagery exist outside allegory, just as The Faerie Queene does.

Richard McCabe underlines the idea of free and equal speech creating an unruly woman or witch when he states, "Verbal facility was an essential trait of the 'witch' and, just as the witch was most potent in her 'charms,' the seductress was most potent in her eloquence."<sup>11</sup> Herein lies a link which both forms and informs any discussion of a witch, even the most loathsome hag--witchcraft and sex. All of the women in Endimion draw their power from nature and the earth and/or from speech or song ('charms'). Two of the most intriguing women in this context are Dipsas and Semele. The hag (who may present a beautiful face) and the shrew whose main virtue, it seems, is her sharp tongue, are ambiguously attractive. Lisa Jardine notes that "Greek and Roman comedy and satire, Eastern legend, medieval estates literature, and Biblical iconography . . . all contain representations of garrulous, determined and ingenious women. And there is a disturbing consensus among these varied sources as to the unacceptable, emasculating, and yet curiously seductive nature of such female attributes."<sup>12</sup>

Yet much of the intrigue in Lyly's play lies in the fact that this female power is not always unacceptable, and not emasculating. The men are no less men for their fine emotions, usually gendered by early modern and modern critics alike as female; the women no less women for the power they wield. The ending is a happy one. However, despite the various pairings which occur, sexuality throughout the play is muted and dispersed. One must look at all of the women and analyse briefly their place in the text in order fully to understand the place of the avowed hag and shrew.

Floscula, defined in the dramatis personae as Tellus' "attendant and confidante," is seen mainly in the second scene of the play. During the course thereof, she does not let herself or her opinion be ruled by Tellus' grief and jealousy; rather, she attempts to dissuade Tellus from her task, warning her that love gained by magic

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<sup>11</sup>Richard A. McCabe, Incest, Drama, and Nature's Law 1550-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 206.

<sup>12</sup>Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters (Sussex: Harvester, 1983) 104.



is only a pale illusion of true love. When at last she cedes the argument, it is not because she is convinced of the rightness of her mistress' argument, but because she sees she is making no headway against it. In fact, her last words to Tellus are only just shy of impertinence: "Well, vse your owne wyll; but you shal finde that loue gotten with witch-craft is as vnpleasant, as fish taken with medicines vnwholsome."<sup>13</sup> This speech shows more than a passing familiarity with both witchcraft and medicine. Clearly Floscula is not ill-educated. One does, however, wonder exactly where and how she gained the experience of magically-inspired emotions.

Floscula's allegiance lies clearly with Endimion. When she gets in the last words of I.ii., little doubt is left in the audience's mind but that she will have no part of Tellus' plot. And indeed, the next time we see her, she says as much: "Vse your discretion," she says to Tellus. "I will in this case neither give counsell nor consent, for there cannot bee a thing more monstrous then to force affection by sorcery, neither doe I imagin anie thing more impossible."<sup>14</sup> After this time we see Floscula only as part of Cynthia's court, bewailing Endimion's fate and rejoicing in his cure.

Flavia and Scintilla appear only in II.ii. However, in this scene, they prove themselves to be the sharpest wits in the play, as well as the bawdiest. Their argument (the weeping at the end of the scene is singularly unconvincing, considering the strength of spirit they show in their previous interchange and in the subsequent baiting of Tophas) is well-paced and clever. Favilla's response to Dares, "Away peeuish boy, a rodde were better vnder thy girdle, than loue in thy mouth : it will be a forward Cocke that croweth in the shell"<sup>15</sup> is blatantly sexual; Scintilla's later enjoinder to the same page, "You will be a good one if you liue"<sup>16</sup> is insolent and

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<sup>13</sup>I.ii.75-77.

<sup>14</sup>I.iv.5-8. Here her convictions seem less sure than they were. Perhaps Dipsas, now present in the flesh, has shaken her; or perhaps Floscula holds a natural antipathy to Dipsas.

<sup>15</sup>II.ii.14-16.

<sup>16</sup>II.ii.55.

perhaps a bit threatening as well. One of these two women--we are not told which--has a squirrel on a chain for a pet. Squirrels are a sexually symbolic animal. By conflation with "scurril" and "scurrilitie," "squirrilitie" and its variants take on "coarse or indecent" as meanings (OED). Holding a squirrel on a chain keeps indecency in check; however, making a pet of one implies the opposite.<sup>17</sup> In *Flavia and Scintilla*, then, we have women who refuse to be cowed, except perhaps by each other, and who do not suffer from the muted or repressed sexuality suffered by the other characters in the play. They demonstrate that they can spar as equals with the wits, and that they do not fear sexual innuendo. To some extent this may be due to the fact that they are playing the part that rustics play in so many Tudor plays--of comic relief, almost of antimasque--but they also are unruly women. In addition, *Scintilla* is an older woman, called "your Matronship" by *Favilla* at line 32. *Dares'* comment at 53-54, "It is their propertie to carrie, in their eyes, fire and water, teares and torches, and in their mouthes, honie and gall," is his comment on the nature of women; however, in context, and in light of *Scintilla's* immediate witty rejoinder, it sets the two maids up as shrews. Valued shrews, but shrews none the less.

*Semele*, beloved of *Eumenides*, is as shrewish as ever Shakespeare's *Kate* is, though due to *Cynthia's* prohibition she speaks little during the play. She is a strong woman, daring to speak out even against *Cynthia*. *Jardine* states, "the woman with a sharp tongue breaks the social order: she is strictly disorderly. Discordant, disruptive, unruly, she threatens to sabotage the . . . harmony which depends upon her general submissiveness."<sup>18</sup> In this case, it is the celestial harmony of *Cynthia's* court which is threatened. For although sharp-tongued, *Semele* is more than capable of inspiring devotion to rival *Endimion's* for *Cynthia*. If this were not true, *Eumenides*

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. *Mother Bombie* (Bond 164-228) II.ii 13-14: "I think Lucio be gone a squirelling, but Ile squirell him for it." *Lucio* is a rascal and a wit, ripe for cozening, taverning and (it is implied) wenching. The OED lists this line under the prosaic definition of hunting for squirrels, but "Ile squirell him for it" does not fit with that definition, whereas some promised, nebulous vague sexual threat would.

<sup>18</sup>*Jardine* 106.



would never have seen to the bottom of the fountain, and found the man who will reclaim Dipsas. Of course Cynthia imposes silence upon her. A queen does not wish to be bested by one of her ladies; Cynthia, though regal, never shows herself as capable of wit and wordplay as some of the "lesser" women in the play.

Semele's relationship with Eumenides is, however, problematic. In I.i., Eumenides demonstrates a tongue as sharp as Semele's and as unruly as Floscula's. Yet he is not condemned for his straight speaking, though he be named the "kindly one."<sup>19</sup> Jardine claims this is typical: "In literature . . . shrews are always women, though philologically they may properly be male, and they exercise a bewitching effect on the men who are subjected to their tongue's lash. Indeed, the fate of such ill-natured wives as did inevitably exist . . . was not uncommonly to be accused of witchcraft. . . ." <sup>20</sup> Lyly utilises the shrew as a type. However, the discrimination which silences Semele whilst allowing her partner to speak is a reflection of a society which privileges male speech over female. Eumenides is shown to be precisely the sort of courtier and true lover a court needs; Semele has virtues which are recognised only by her wooer. The miracle lies in the fact that anyone recognises them at all. It may be because Eumenides' thought and speech match the shrew's that he loves Semele, but still, no one thinks of designating Eumenides as anything pejorative. Even Eumenides acknowledges that Semele's "nature . . . hath beene alwaies accounted light,"<sup>21</sup> which "lightness" can apply to morals as well as to light-heartedness.<sup>22</sup> The link between female verbal facility and witchcraft is underlined yet again.

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<sup>19</sup>The Eumenides are also the Furies, female instruments of vengeance; this puts an odd and ambiguous slant on Eumenides' role.

<sup>20</sup>Jardine 103.

<sup>21</sup>III.i.14-15.

<sup>22</sup>This discussion is carried further in chapter 10.

At the end, Semele is honest; she does not submit meekly to the fate Cynthia decrees for her. She remains true to herself: "A harde choyce, Madame, either to be married if I say nothing, or to lose my tongue if I speake a word. Yet doe I rather choose to haue my tongue cut out, than my heart distempered."<sup>23</sup> Only Eumenides' offer to have his tongue cut out rather than hers reconciles her to him. By this act, he submits his speech to hers. By this act, Semele (named after the one of Jove's mistresses who dared too much) is united to the Furies. And in light of the period views that, as Elizabeth Harvey summarises, "women's voice or tongue . . . is seen to be imbricated with female sexuality,"<sup>24</sup> he may even submit his desire to hers.

Bagoa, Dipsas' servant, is another attendant who disobeys her mistress. For discovering her teacher's activities, she gets turned into a tree until Cynthia turns her back so that Tophas has a mate.<sup>25</sup> G.K. Hunter claims, on the basis of similar transformation scenes in Gallathea, The Woman in the Moone, and Love's Metamorphosis, that Lyly had a trick tree as a piece of scenery of which he was particularly fond, and that therefore Bagoa's turning into a tree has little or no symbolic significance.<sup>26</sup> However, the image of the hag's adjunct trapped in a tree certainly prefigures Sycorax and Ariel in Shakespeare's Tempest.

Bagoa speaks very little in the play, and in her speech (II.iii.45-52) provides a counterbalance to Floscula, for she, too, bemoans Endimion's fate. Bagoa must have some arcane powers, or at least a predilection for magic, for Dipsas entrusts her with the magic fan which wafts Endimion to dream-land. Also, the end of Bagoa's speech is unusual: "But I heare Dipsas comming; I dare not repine, least she make me pine, and rocke me into such a deepe sleepe, that I shall not awake to my marriage."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>V.iii.215-17.

<sup>24</sup>Elizabeth D. Harvey, Ventriloquized Voices (1992; London: Routledge, 1995) 4.

<sup>25</sup>See V.iii.5-6: If Bagoa had not bewraied it, howe then shoulde it haue come to light ?"

<sup>26</sup>G.K. Hunter, John Lyly: the Humanist as Courtier (London: Routledge, 1962) 110.

<sup>27</sup>II.iii.50-52.



Bagoa demonstrates her verbal facility with the pun upon "pine," which indeed prefigures her punishment, despite the fact that Dipsas threatens to "turne thy haire to Adders, and all thy teeth in thy heade to tongues."<sup>28</sup> Bagoa also seems prescient in prophesying her marriage. Lyly very carefully balances all of his characters in Endimion; everyone has a match (the two sterile philosophers pair each other), even if it is not the match the characters themselves originally sought. There is no evidence at all, therefore, either textual or contextual, that Bagoa pines for any absent lover. Nor is there evidence that she has met Tophas. Indeed, if she had, it is likely that she, as do the other players capable of verbal manipulation, would have baited him, not wed him. And yet she speaks of her marriage as a certainty. It can be remarked that any maiden would pick her marriage as the one most certain and important event in her life, and therefore that Bagoa uses the phrase "and not awake to my marriage" in this light. However, Lyly is a careful author, and well aware of traditions of prophecy--Corsites mentions Cassandra in IV.i.; the words engraven about the brim of the fountain smack of prophecy; Endimion's dream is as much oracular as allegorical. Dipsas is a witch on the Greco-Roman model. One of the powers most sought after in classical magic is divination. One does not take an apprentice who evinces no talent for her chosen craft, and as already stated Bagoa shows magical knowledge and competence. Balance and context all support Bagoa's being a seer.

Tellus and Cynthia are much more complex characters. This complexity heightens as the two are aspects or rather complements of each other--earth and sky, power temporal and spiritual. Both are set up as divine beings. Tellus exclaims rightly that she is a match for Cynthia:

No comparison Floscula? and why so? is not my beauty diuine,  
 whose body is decked with faire flowers, and vaines are Vines,  
 yeelding sweet liquor to the dullest spirits, whose eares are Come, to  
 bring strength, and whose heares are grasse, to bring abundance? Doth

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<sup>28</sup>II.iii.56-57. Herein are neatly shown the anxieties sown by women's speech. Dipsas shall turn Bagoa into a gorgon, whose look can turn men to stone; furthermore, Bagoa shall have a multiplicity of tongues to rob men of their speech as well as their manhood and life.

not Frankincense and Myrrhe breath out of my nostrils, and all the sacrifice of the Gods breede in my bowels? Infinite are my creatures, without which neyther thou, nor Endimion, nor any could loue, or liue.<sup>29</sup>

Tellus is both earth and nature, providing all upon which and for which men live. She is fruitful and bountiful, contrasting with Cynthia's magnificent sterility. Yet Tellus too is virgin, as she states to Corsites in IV.i. Tellus also is well-used to adoration: "it may bee hee is in loue with mee, for (Endimion, hard-harted Endimion, excepted) what is he that is not enamoured of my beautie?"<sup>30</sup> She rules indirectly, for she cannot control men's lives (though it should be noted that she provides the herbs which Dipsas plucks for her workings).

The words that Albert Feuillerat chooses to describe Tellus are telling: she "est d'une beauté ensorceleuse."<sup>31</sup> Some of the imagery used by Lyly for Tellus recalls Spenser's Faerie Queene.<sup>32</sup> Her exile recalls Florimel's in III.vii; problematically, Tellus is also the Hag abiding in a "desert place," "choosing solitary to abide" with only her son, in some ways a Corsites-like ruffian, for company.<sup>33</sup> In this instance, Tellus is the witch who creates the Snowy Florimell, insubstantial embodiment of men's desires. Whilst in the tower, she is prisoner not just to Cynthia's judgment but to her own desire. Though Davis observes that one of the remedies for unruly women was "honest work that busied her hands,"<sup>34</sup> with which Tellus is supposed to occupy herself in her tower, we find in the last act that all she has been able to accomplish is a picture of Endimion. As Tellus is the embodiment of the divine physical, this can be read to mean that attempting to exile physical desire will

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<sup>29</sup>I.ii.19-26.

<sup>30</sup>IV.i.5-7.

<sup>31</sup>Albert Feuillerat, John Lyly (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1910) 160.

<sup>32</sup>J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt, eds., Spenser: Poetical Works (1970; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 1-406. All references to this edition.

<sup>33</sup> Spenser III.vii.6.

<sup>34</sup>Davis 126.



serve no purpose. Cynthia ignores this when she fixes Tellus' marriage to Corsites (this can be seen as privileging male desire over female, since Cynthia also ignores the desire which in the classical myth drew the moon down to her lover), and cruelly states to Tellus, "Then so much of Endimion as his picture commeth to, possesse and play withall."<sup>35</sup>

Cynthia claims that she rules because the gods have seen fit to grant it to her to do so;<sup>36</sup> however, Endimion's many rhapsodies establish her, too, as divine. In addition, Tellus traps him into confessing Cynthia's divinity in II.i. Tellus repeatedly tries to make Cynthia mortal (after all, if Cynthia is mortal she, like all men, is subject to Tellus' bounty and rule); however, Endimion places her firmly into the realm of the divine, even comparing her with Venus and Vesta. Again, as with Tellus, sexual conflict is apparent: as Tellus is both mother and virgin, so Cynthia is Venus and Vesta, hot and cold, lusty and chaste. This dualism, as well as the imagery of Tellus, recalls Spenser.

Some of this conflict must be due to the fact that Endimion is a revisionist text. Lyly pays scant heed to the "real" myth of Endimion and the moon. Originally, the moon falls in love with Endimion, and descends from her sphere to be with him. The sleep which falls upon Endimion is not due to the earth's jealousy, but to Jupiter's intervention. Feuillerat rightly observes that Jupiter is nowhere present in the play,<sup>37</sup> which further supports the statement that all action in Lyly's Endimion belongs to women. Removing the great father-god figure places the power straight into the hands of the women rulers.

This change in the myth necessarily changes the characters. Feuillerat observes, when speaking of the inversion Lyly enacts: "Cynthia, loin de commettre les tendres folies auxquelles elle se laissa aller sur le Mont Latmos, est chaste, froide,

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<sup>35</sup>V.iii.254-55.

<sup>36</sup>V.iii.25-6: "the gouernment that I now possesse by the eternall Gods."

<sup>37</sup>Feuillerat 142.

indifférente, et refuse de partager la passion qu'elle a inspirée." This manifold image casts the moon as Muse, as a pseudo-Medusa (his gaze upon her is, ultimately, what puts Endimion into his coma), and as Cynthia, monarch on high.<sup>38</sup> Natale Conti, in his Mythologies, notes a similar conflation on the part of Hecate, who can also be Luna. Hecate's physical aspect resembles a gorgon: "Instead of hair, Hecate had tangles of hissing serpents and vipers that looked like intricately twisted knots."<sup>39</sup> Lyly also complicates the issue in his Prologue, in which he states that the play "is a tale of the Man in the Moone." Similarly, he says "there liueth none vnder the Sunne, that knowes what to make of the Man in the Moone." In a text where the man in the moon is a woman, Cynthia, this makes a man/woman, unsexed, the object of Endimion's passions.<sup>40</sup> This androgyny recalls not only Britomart, but Elizabeth I. Both women generate sexual tension in their society. Both must succeed, Britomart so she can beget Elizabeth's line, and Elizabeth as reigning monarch. Despite these Elizabethan complications, there is more than this to be derived from the character of Cynthia, and in general, and specifically in Lyly, one must take more account of the aspects of the moon.

Lyly himself emphasises the changing aspect of the moon in the prophecy in the fountain. Endimion must be kissed by "shee whose figure of all is the perfectest, and neuer to be measured--alwaies one, yet neuer the same--still inconstant, yet neuer

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<sup>38</sup>For further information on the Cynthia/moon cult, I refer the reader to Frances Yates' work Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (London: Routledge, 1975).

<sup>39</sup>Anthony DiMatteo, Natale Conti's Mythologies: A Select Translation (New York: Garland, 1994) 143. DiMatteo notes that 31 editions of Conti's work appeared in varying languages between 1551 and 1669; Conti anthologises the mythologies of all of the classical authors he can obtain. If Tudor and Stuart writers could not read the classical authors themselves, authors such as Conti made them and their images accessible. Lucan was available in many Latin editions in the sixteenth century (BL OPAC). Robert West summarises some of the many pagan, occult, and mystic treatises with which an educated Elizabethan gentleman would have been familiar, noting that he would have personal knowledge of "practicing magicians [such] as Dr. John Dee and Simon Forman. He was sure to have some acquaintance with the Occult Philosophy of the early sixteenth-century "magician" . . . Agrippa." Robert H. West, Scot and Renaissance Writings on Witchcraft (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 7.

<sup>40</sup>Lyly's later play, The Woman in the Moone, replaces Cynthia with Pandora, the all-gifted, and the source of all troubles.



wauering."<sup>41</sup> The moon has always been a triple goddess: maiden, mother, and crone; Artemis, Selene, Hecate. One aspect cannot be ignored in favour of the others. The three are "alwaies one, yet neuer the same." Linking this with the Elizabethan cult raises problems with the image of the queen. Portraying the aging queen as a crone would be very dangerous; she had an official image, as Roy Strong notes in two of his works, which she disseminated and privileged.<sup>42</sup> However, within the play the triple aspect is borne out, if complicated. As already seen, Tellus is a bountiful mother; Cynthia a chaste virgin; the crone, Dipsas.

Witches in general are curious figures. Like female sexuality, which like the menses is linked with the moon, witches are at the same time both taboo and captivating. Critics of witchcraft espouse different approaches to the subject, but nevertheless agree that the prevalent images of witches and witchcraft both mirror and distort societal disquietudes about women.<sup>43</sup> To the last, witches are unruly, disorderly women--women who do not fit in with established, submissive roles. They have the powers of speech and action. As already demonstrated, all of the women in Endimion fit this description to some extent. Dipsas, however, is not only an avowed witch--and a professed hag--but is also the most powerful figure in the play.

The prevalent Tudor and Stuart image of the witch is of the hag, as contemporary accounts amply demonstrate. Twentieth-century perceptions do not, as a whole, differ widely, though in the latter half of the century the image is being combated.<sup>44</sup> Appropriately enough for those who by tradition learn their magic arts from Hecate, reigning aspect of the dark (or new) moon, hags are perceived to dress in

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<sup>41</sup>III.iv.155-57.

<sup>42</sup>Roy C. Strong, The Cult of Elizabeth (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977); and Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987).

<sup>43</sup>See Introduction, and also G.R. Quaife, Godly Zeal and Furious Rage (London: Croom Helm, 1987), e.g.

<sup>44</sup>See Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (London: Routledge, 1996) and Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon (1979; Boston: Beacon, 1986).

black. They possess knowledge that can only be learnt in darkness; they harvest the bounty of the earth, but use it for infernal purposes. They are beyond sexuality, and are therefore even more unknowable; ironically they follow the traditions of the daughters of the sun, Circe and Medea.

From antiquity onwards, the most feared witches have been either seductresses, like the two just mentioned, or hags, like Lucan's Erictho, who forms the archetype. Erictho is a Thessalian witch. Thessaly has always been famed for its witches. Lucan remarks that the land itself "produces poisonous herbs in the mountains, and the rocks feel it when magicians sing their deadly spells."<sup>45</sup> Noted not only for calling away "the gods from every altar except her own", the Thessalian can cause "a love that is not willed by destiny . . . [to enter] an insensible heart."<sup>46</sup> Thessalians can alter the courses of night and day, despite the protests of the father god; they affect the weather; and "by their techniques the clear moon . . . grew dim . . . just as if the earth had cut off the moon from the reflections of her brother, the sun, and projected its own shadows into the light from heaven. The moon is . . . strongly affected by magic spells and pulled down. . . ."<sup>47</sup> Thessalian witches' "bold criminal acts surpass your imagination and. . .[their] specialty is the impossible."<sup>48</sup> Several times during the course of this study we will come across witches whose actions match those described above.

The implications for Endimion are obvious. Dipsas is not, as Purkiss alleges, "a local cunning woman as seen by the learned."<sup>49</sup> Cunning women have different emphases, discussed here in later chapters; Lyly himself portrays his self-professed

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<sup>45</sup>In Georg Luck, ed., Arcana Mundi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 195.

<sup>46</sup>Luck 195.

<sup>47</sup>Luck 196-97.

<sup>48</sup>Luck 195.

<sup>49</sup>Purkiss 188.



cunning woman, Mother Bombie, quite differently.<sup>50</sup> That Lyly knew of the Thessalian tradition is manifest: Eumenides, when he encounters Geron, states, "I am going to Thessalie, to seeke remedie for Endimion."<sup>51</sup> If a Thessalian's specialties are the impossible, then, as Tellus says, "in obtaining of loue what impossibilities will I not try?"<sup>52</sup> As Lucan avers, a Thessalian witch's powers are paramount, and cannot be gainsaid: they will reign "though Persian Babylon and Memphis, full of mysteries, may open every shrine of their ancient magicians."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Gyptes and Pythagoras are powerless against Dipsas. As Gyptes says, "It may be that either the Enchauntresse shall dye, or els be discovered: if either happen, I will then practise the vtmost of my Arte."<sup>54</sup> Likewise he avers "it is enchauntment, and that so strange that no Arte can vndoe it, for that heauiness argueth a mallice vnremouueable in the Enchauntresse."<sup>55</sup> Gyptes voices the belief that when a witch dies, her spells are broken (IV.iii.147, 158-59). Barring supernatural interference, the skies showing "some meanes more than miraculous" (147-48), awaiting a witch's death is the only recourse. Gyptes implies that Cynthia, the heavenly miracle, might be able to reverse Dipsas' spell. However, though Endimion is woken by Cynthia's kiss, Cynthia is not aware that this is the action which should be taken. Were Cynthia all-powerful, all-knowing, she could have broken the spell instantly.

Dipsas never alters the course of night and day, but Tellus is indeed, via Dipsas, trying to "project [her] own shadows into the light from heaven." Both Tellus and Cynthia are subject to Dipsas' power, for Tellus cannot enact her revenge without Dipsas, and Cynthia is drawn down from her heavenly sphere to free

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<sup>50</sup>See chapter 9.

<sup>51</sup>III.iv.17.

<sup>52</sup>I.iv.9-10.

<sup>53</sup>Luck 195.

<sup>54</sup>IV.iii.158-60. Emphasis mine.

<sup>55</sup>IV.iii. 144-46.

Endimion. As Dipsas states, "I can darken the Sunne by my skil, and remooue the Moone out of her course; I restore youth to the aged, and make hills without bottoms."<sup>56</sup> Certainly Cynthia, in not only reviving Endimion, but, Medea-like, restoring his youth, is also partaking of the type of power Dipsas describes. As a moon deity, she shares an aspect (the crone) with Hecate, goddess of magic, whose name witches take in Macbeth and The Witch. She may claim Dipsas has no effect upon her,<sup>57</sup> but Cynthia does not appear upon the stage until after Dipsas' spell has been cast. It could be said that Dipsas sets the myth aright by drawing Cynthia down to look upon Endimion.<sup>58</sup>

Diane Purkiss believes a case can be made for parallelism between Cynthia and Dipsas, on the grounds that, essentially, they are two aspects of the same whole. With Philippa Berry, Purkiss states, "Lyly's efforts to make a distinction between Cynthia, the powerful queen-object of Endimion's hopeless longing, and the witch Dipsas fail because it is Dipsas who incarnates the bodily reality of the (undesirable) ageing Queen Elizabeth."<sup>59</sup> In terms borrowed from Gloriana in The Faerie Queene, Cynthia is both Venus and Virgo, maiden and mother. Dipsas is the crone of reality. However, the cult of Elizabeth persisted throughout her reign and, as has been stated, she constructed her own image, which was not that of a hag. Whatever the reality, the image remained pure.

Purkiss also supports the idea of Dipsas, Tellus, and Cynthia being varying aspects of the moon and each other. "In terms of mythography," she avers,

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<sup>56</sup>I.iv.20-22. Luck avers (194) that Erictho's revival of a corpse was what inspired Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. V.iii.24-33. The lady doth protest too much. . .

<sup>58</sup> I am not arguing that Dipsas is a new literary type; rather she is a development of the classical witch, one of the types established in previous chapters. The first Dipsas appeared in Ovid's Amores (I.8). See Peter Green, trans., Ovid: The Erotic Poems (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) 97. As each author in this study plays with the notion of witch and explores the various types, and as this study is not a critical edition of any text, it is beyond the realm of this study to trace exactly all sources for the witches in every text.

<sup>59</sup>Purkiss 187.



"differentiation is impossible to sustain."<sup>60</sup> However, as Tellus claims earthly powers as opposed to celestial ones, casting her as a complement rather than an aspect rings more true. Similarly, Purkiss' relegation of Dipsas to subplot, when Dipsas' actions drive the plot, is confusing. When Purkiss states that "Dipsas is desirable only to comic effect" (188), in contrast to the other women in the play, she does not take into account Geron's desire. In light of her comment that Dipsas incarnates the Queen, Purkiss would have Lyly portraying desire of the Queen as laughable, which is dangerous and, in light of Lyly's portrayal of the court, unconvincing.

However, there is no doubting Tophas sees Dipsas as a hag, nor that Tophas' description of the witch is comic:

O what a fine thin hayre hath Dipsas! What a prettie low forehead!  
 What a tall & statelie nose! What little hollow eyes! What great and  
 goodly lypes! Howe harmlesse she is being toothlesse! her fingers  
 fatte and short, adorned with long nayles like a Bytter! In howe sweet  
 a proportion her cheekes hang downe to her brests like dugges, and her  
 pappes to her waste like bagges! What a lowe stature shee is, and yet  
 what a great foote she carryeth! Howe thrifty must she be in whom  
 there is no waste! Howe vertuous is shee like to be, ouer whom no  
 man can be jealous!<sup>61</sup>

Though Lyly does not, as Spenser does with his Duessa, link her monstrosity mainly with her sex,<sup>62</sup> the resultant picture is still rather horrible, and in direct contrast to the other beauties on stage. Cynthia subtly reinforces this image: "Dipsas, thy yeeres are not so manie as thy vices; yet more in number than commonly nature dooth afforde, or iustice shoulde permit."<sup>63</sup>

Such description should afford little scope for play in Dipsas' character. She is a witch; she is a hag; she is evil. Cynthia refers to Dipsas' power as "that vile Arte";

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<sup>60</sup>Purkiss 188.

<sup>61</sup>III.iii.50-60.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Spenser I.ii.40-41: "A filthy foule old woman I did vew. . . / Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous, / Were hidd in water, that I could not see, / But they did seem more foule and hideous / Than womans shape man would beleewe to be."

<sup>63</sup>V.iii.19-21.

Dipsas herself calls it "a most horrible and hatefull trade," which has not only "substance" but unlooked-for "shadow" as its price.<sup>64</sup> Her claims for her powers are Thessalian in nature, and she avers that, "there is nothing so wicked that I haue not done."<sup>65</sup> She should, in a play which treats witches traditionally, meet the same unfortunate end that so many women met during the witch hunts. Indeed Cynthia threatens to send her into the desert (like she sends Tellus), to be surrounded, Circe-like, by beasts.<sup>66</sup> But none of this happens. Dipsas is reconciled to wisdom and society, and lives as happily ever after as any of the characters. Very seldom are witches re-embraced by the society from which they are exiled (be that exile self-imposed or not). The fact that she is re-incorporated, and her husband happy to have her back despite her wickedness, necessitates further exploration and analysis.

Though she is a witch, still she is respected. Tellus refers to her "cunning too exquisit," late in the play when (temporarily) overcome with remorse; earlier in the play, Tellus refers to her as "Dipsas, whom as many honour for age as wonder at for cunning."<sup>67</sup> The fact that two men wish to have her implies that she is not as ugly as she is made out to be. Dipsas herself, when she says, "If to liue and still be more miserable would better content him [Geron], I would wish of all creatures to be oldest and ugliest," implies that she is not.<sup>68</sup>

The key difference between Dipsas and the stereotypical hag is that she, apparently, has had her power curtailed. Whereas Middleton's Heccat, for example, both grants love-charms and renders love (or at least lovers) impotent, Lyly's Dipsas tells Tellus,

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<sup>64</sup>V.iii.258-59; 262-63.

<sup>65</sup>V.iii.40.

<sup>66</sup>NB this is a parallel between Cynthia and Dipsas. Cynthia exiles Tellus. Cynthia also accuses Dipsas, saying, "Thys noble Gentleman Geron, once thy husband, but nowe thy mortall hate, didst thou procure to lyue in a Deserte . . ." (V.iii.34-35).

<sup>67</sup>I.iv.11-12.

<sup>68</sup>V.iii.45-47.



there is nothing I can not doe, but that onely you would haue me doe ; and therin I differ from the Gods, that I am not able to rule harts ;<sup>69</sup> for were it in my power to place affection by appointment, I would make such euill appetites, such inordinate lusts,<sup>70</sup> such cursed desires, as all the worlde should be filled both with superstitious heates, and extreame loue.<sup>71</sup>

Tellus suffers from an evil appetite; Tophas' lusts--both for women and other sorts of prey--are definitely inordinate; Geron's desire is cursed, for it exiles him. To some extent, Endimion's desire is also cursed, for he never obtains that which he truly desires. Perhaps then Dipsas is not telling the whole truth, just as people do not tell the whole truth about her. She can, indeed, "breede slacknes in loue, though neuer roote it out,"<sup>72</sup> and the fate under which she places Endimion is not so very different to the fate she enacted for herself and her husband. As Geron says, "Dipsas, Thou [sic] hast made this difference betwene me and Endimion, that both being young, thou hast caused me to wake in melancholie, loosing the ioyes of my youth, and hym to sleepe, not remembering youth."<sup>73</sup> One of the shadows of the substance of Dipsas' power was the slackening of her love. Unlike Middleton's Heccat, she seems, in the world of the play, to have traded her sexuality for her power. This is odd, considering the "normal" conflation of the two, and may be a point for a parallel between Cynthia and Dipsas. However, Dipsas still inspires lust in Tophas and desire and love in Geron; respect and love for Cynthia remain neoplatonic.

Here lies the central difference between Dipsas and the rest of the women in the play. Dipsas alone has known a man carnally. She has been married; she is not a virgin. Having passed over the threshold of virginity into womanhood, she carries

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<sup>69</sup>This reinforces Cynthia's divinity again, for she of course does rule hearts. Or she allegedly does--note again she has no influence over Tellus' heart, which, though she is wed to Corsites, remains Endimion's.

<sup>70</sup>Cf., perhaps, Tophas' realistic appraisal of marriage: "I care not, so she bee a wenche" in V.iii.

<sup>71</sup>I.iv.20-28.

<sup>72</sup>I.iv.32-33.

<sup>73</sup>V.iii.48-51.

with her, more than any other character, the power of sex. No one may therefore truly stand against her, even if her powers have been curtailed so that she cannot rule hearts outright. Men desire her, just as men desire Tellus, who though a virgin is also a mother-figure. When she is reintegrated with the court and society, then, sexuality at last may be resolved in the play. Eumenides, who by offering his tongue to ransom Semele's cedes his right to speech to hers, incorporates the unruly scold. By her marriage to Corsites, Tellus, the woman who dared to act, is also redeemed. Mary Beth Rose asserts that "[i]n Lyly . . . sexual desire, though powerful and unavoidable, cannot be incorporated in a civil, humane society. Instead it must be conquered, overcome."<sup>74</sup> This seems to be true, unless both male and female desire is used, harnessed to make solid couples who reconcile disorderly women with their place in the order of the court, and, by extension, Cynthian society, of which the court is the epitome. Cynthia remains chaste and supreme, but not so distant. She has, by Dipsas, been pulled down from her heavenly sphere to participate in this rite of integration.

Davis observes,

Play with the unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict of efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society. The woman-on-top might even facilitate innovation in historical theory and political behavior.<sup>75</sup>

The unruly women in Endimion, especially Dipsas, ultimately unite their various aspects in Cynthia's court to make a society in which women's power is equal to (if not greater than) men's. Eumenides has the last line of the play which bears his friend's name. Though he is male, his speech is not a controlling monologue. His is not the overwhelming voice of the patriarchy, which we will see in later chapters. Eumenides offered to ransom his tongue for a woman's, and his last words, "We all attend," are fully subordinate to Cynthia's command, "Then follow." Though Lyly

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<sup>74</sup>Mary Beth Rose, The Expense of Spirit (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 24.



may be an author of the establishment, he realises that that establishment is headed by a woman, Cynthia/Elizabeth. Endimion argues that disorderly women should be rendered orderly, but unlike most witchcraft authors in this study, he portrays a happy ending for both sexes, unthreatened and unprejudiced by incorporation of ex-witches. This, in the end, is the source of Endimion's uniqueness.

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<sup>75</sup>Davis 131.

CHAPTER 4. DOST CALL ME WITCH? DEFINITION AND IDENTITY IN THE WITCH OF EDMONTON

Sawy. *Dost call me Witch?*

O. Bank. *I do, Witch, I do: and worse I would, knew I a name more hateful.*

*The Witch of Edmonton*, II.i.19-20<sup>1</sup>

Mother Sawyer, the eponymous witch of Edmonton in the 1621 play of that name, keeps company with Dipsas in the hag category of witches.<sup>2</sup> Both are bent in appearance and motive, theoretically abhorrent to the society in which they live. But Dipsas is educated, literate, more than able to hold her own in courtly society, and relies on her own inherent power, aided by herbs and props derived from the (female) earth. Both the actual and textual Elizabeth Sawyers, however, are poor, victims of the hierarchical society and attitudes to which they are subject, and make subservient pacts with an almost omnipotent male devil to achieve their power. Being subject to the overriding patriarchy characterises Mother Sawyer, as well as the young folk in the play. Regardless of the merit (or lack thereof) of the scions of the patriarchy, as manifest in Old Banks, Carter, Ratcliffe and Thorney, Sir Arthur, and the Justice, their values enclose and bind everyone else. Mother Sawyer, rendered liminal to this enclosure by age and circumstance, is seen by the establishment as dangerous and is eliminated, despite her valiant rearguard effort to grab its definitions of herself and use them to her own ends. The men of the establishment in the play, however, bear little to no resemblance to the men in either Endimion or, for that matter, The Faerie Queene. They keep company best with the characters in Mother Bombie and The

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<sup>1</sup>Etta Soiref Onat, *The Witch of Edmonton: A Critical Edition* (New York: Garland, 1980). Hereafter all references, to the play and to Goodcole's pamphlet, are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Though there has been much debate about which author--Dekker, Ford, or Rowley--penned which bits of the play, that debate is irrelevant here. As most critics agree that Dekker was responsible for the Mother Sawyer scenes, when an author's name is required, Dekker's will be used.



Wise-woman of Hogsdon. The Witch of Edmonton has no courtiers, no comedy of manners; its actions are darker, more inexorable than those of Cynthia and her court in Endimion. Dipsas can be redeemed; only divine, off-stage judgment can redeem Mother Sawyer (though Frank and Winnifride repent and are redeemed within the compass of the play), and she is hastened along the path to it.

Etta Soiref Onat claims that the two types of hag which Dipsas and Mother Sawyer represent are quite distinct, and belong to different perceptive realms, the educated and the common, the fancy and the real, or the "high" and "low": "Dipsas has little in common with the English witch who was being brought to trial. Her practices in works of 'art, not nature' are more reminiscent of the acts of the enchantress of classical legend or creatures of the fairy-tale than of the maleficia for which the English witch was feared and prosecuted."<sup>3</sup> Onat also relegates Dipsas to the role of comic (which relegation to minor status I have already refuted). Yet despite her avowal that the two women have no common ground, Onat admits that "There is no doubt that he [Lyly] intended Dipsas to be taken seriously," and also that "The Elizabethan audience no doubt thought of her as a witch in terms of contemporary belief, even in her romantic portrayal."<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt whatsoever that Dekker intends Mother Sawyer to be taken seriously. Initially a victim of circumstance and a scapegoat for ill-will, Mother Sawyer attempts to fashion herself in revenge for other people's perceptions of her. The initial distych states Frank's case first, then Mother Sawyer's: "Forc'd marriage, Murder; Murder, Blood requires: / Reproach, Revenge; Revenge, Hells help desires."<sup>5</sup> The misfortune and inevitability of Mother Sawyer's fate come, in Dekker's statement at least, not because of her revenge, but because she enlists Hell's aid in its enactment and, of course, because there was no other way her revenge could have been accomplished. Mother Sawyer's

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<sup>3</sup>Onat 27.

<sup>4</sup>Onat 27-28.

<sup>5</sup>Onat 175.

actions get her hanged; however, both she, with acute clarity of vision, and the audience, with their greater knowledge of the plot, understand that she would have been persecuted whether she compacted with the devil or not; both the audience's and the playwright's sympathies lie with Mother Sawyer, rather than Frank, the alleged hero who makes his peace. Dekker grants Mother Sawyer a dignity, pride, and awareness of her situation which lifts her above the common pale and, in the eyes of the audience, at least, even elevates her morally above her social betters, like the grasping and sinful Sir Arthur.

Onat believes that sympathy for either the textual or actual Elizabeth Sawyer is a twentieth-century prejudice, and therefore, one infers, invalid for a critical argument. "If we feel pity for the witch of the [Goodcole] narrative," states Onat, "it is only . . . that our twentieth-century rationalism makes us see her as the obvious victim of prejudice and superstition (herself as much deluded as her persecutors)."<sup>6</sup> Portraying witches as outright heroines and ultimately empowering social or socio-political icons may be unique to the twentieth century;<sup>7</sup> however, the rationalism Onat mentions is not only twentieth-century. Johan Wier (De Praestigiis Daemonum, 1563), Reginald Scot (Discoverie of Witchcraft, 1584) and George Gifford (Dialogue Concerning Witches, 1593) evince the sort of rationalism which sympathises with the plights of the old women being brought to trial in their time. None of these men denies the existence of malefice, but all agree that to some extent the witches are scapegoats, be it of the community or of the devil. Wier, Scot and Gifford are by far outnumbered by their antagonists, who include not only men such as William Perkins (Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft, 1608), who averred that all witches were evil, and "white" witches even more so than "black," but James I, who wrote his treatise on witchcraft specifically to counter Scot's and Wier's. To some extent the

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<sup>6</sup>Onat 72.

<sup>7</sup>See Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (London: Routledge, 1996) for a discussion of this; also Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon (1979; Boston: Beacon, 1986).



boundaries of the debate were drawn along, or rather were perceived to be drawn along, lines of faith. As discussed in chapter 1, James' and Perkins' credulousness springs from their interpretation of their religion, and James' antipathy to Scot and Wier comes from his belief that they are disbelievers.<sup>8</sup> The very fact that a king felt the need to refute the rationalists' claims personally demonstrates the power their arguments must command.<sup>9</sup> Goodcole bears this out: even as he defends Elizabeth's Sawyer's trial and execution, he admits to at least one of the methods of witch-testing, the burning of a piece of thatch from her roof, as "an old ridiculous custom."<sup>10</sup> The play itself invites judgment--the play closes on the Justice's words.

In effect, there are two witches named Sawyer: Elizabeth Sawyer, the historical woman hanged for witchcraft whose confession Goodcole recorded; and Mother Sawyer, her textual counterpart, translated to the stage by Dekker. Inasmuch as a twentieth-century critic can know Elizabeth Sawyer, (s)he knows her through Goodcole's narrative. However, one must recognise that Goodcole constructs and manipulates his narrative and version of Elizabeth Sawyer just as surely as Dekker and the characters he creates construct his.

These two sources portray the same event differently. Each is constructed differently as well. Goodcole's pamphlet is highly rhetorical. It begins with an apology to the reader, in which Goodcole protests (a bit too much for sincerity) that he would not have published the story, but that it was extorted from him by public clamour. Secondly, he says that his Christian conscience demanded that he correct the "most base and false ballads" which touted "ridiculous fictions" of "bewitching corn on the ground" and "of spirits attending her [Sawyer] in Prison."<sup>11</sup> That Sawyer

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<sup>8</sup> For discussions of the various texts' perceptions, see chapter 1 pages 34-36 (Wier), 40-42 (Scot), 43-45 (Gifford), and 40-41 and 47-48 (Perkins). The interest of these texts, as discussed, lie in the fact that in them the locus of the witch becomes a centre for the expression of societal anxieties.

<sup>9</sup> For further analysis, I refer the reader back to Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Onat 382.

<sup>11</sup> Onat 382.

bewitched children and animals, however, is not ridiculous, and is confessed by Sawyer herself. After Goodcole relates the question and answer session, the narrative is turned into a sermon, which exhorts the faithful to avoid the sin of blasphemy, for "it is a plain way to bring you to the Devil; nay that it brings the Devil to you."<sup>12</sup> Blasphemy attracts the Devil; Mother Sawyer's cursing opens her to the Devil's influence. Goodcole here appropriates the function of the traditional scaffold speech. Critics vary in their interpretation of the scaffold speech, which is quite often printed in pamphlet form. Often it is "merely" a gesture of repentance, an attempt to die a "good" or Christian death.<sup>13</sup> However, what no one denies is that scaffold speeches are highly effective utterances. The audience is captive; the condemned holds centre stage. Not only that, people's last words hold certain fascination, and were seen also to hold a certain power, spoken as they are on that last and greatest threshold, that between life and death.

Goodcole allows Sawyer a repetition of her confession and repentance upon the scaffold; she dies in an appropriately submissive and Christian manner. But her words are not the last. Goodcole reserves the last words for his own religious agenda: "Stand on your guard, and watch with sobriety to resist him, the Devil your adversary, who waiteth on you continually, to subvert you; that so you that do detest her [Mother Sawyer's] abominable words and ways, may never taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction, of which she did in this life; from which and from whose power, Lord Jesus, save and defend Thy little Flock. Amen."<sup>14</sup>

This sermon feeds directly into the raging sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debate on women and women's propensities. For nowhere in the sermon, titled

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<sup>12</sup>Onat 399.

<sup>13</sup>The arguments are too long and varied to reproduce in this study; I refer the reader to David Lindley, The Trials of Frances Howard (London: Routledge, 1993) for both a concise and useful summary of the scaffold speech debate and another instance of both history and literature forming people's perceptions of a woman.

<sup>14</sup>Onat 399-400.



"Conclusion" (and not "epilogue" or "afterword") is Elizabeth Sawyer named. Goodcole takes good care to do so in every other section. She is redacted to an omnipresent evil "she," ever likely to fall prey to the Devil. Her "words" are "abominable," erasing in the readers' minds even the devout words of her last speech. Goodcole's rhetoric is both clever and crafty.

Within the intensely claustrophobic world of The Witch Of Edmonton, both views--the rationalists' and Goodcole's earnest condemnation--play upon the stage in the guise of different characters. The fact that the audience comes away supporting precisely that side which is not victorious in the play testifies both to the authors' craft and to the power of their subject matter. Onat believes what Wier and Scot allege, that the fault and blame of a witch-plot rests with the devil. There is some validity in this argument. Structurally, the only constant and firm link between the three plot strands is the devil, who quite happily wreaks havoc wherever he comes, though he is foiled in his bid for Cuddy Banks' soul. Onat relegates all development within the play to the devil as well: "he is the means by which the thematic structure of the play is developed."<sup>15</sup> Michael Hattaway is tempted to concur. He writes, "We might conclude that it is the devil who is responsible for the acts of will that lead to sin, for turning intent to effect. He is a savage figure . . . who must arouse compassion for his victims, for it was he and not they who were possessed of malice."<sup>16</sup>

To say that all blame rests upon Tom, and that the three plot strands meet only where he treads, is short-sighted and ignores those elements of community and claustrophobia--almost of stagnation and despair--which contribute to Mother Sawyer's (and Frank Thorney's) undoing. The sets of characters from the three plot lines are not distinct unto themselves. Indeed, if they did not mix and mingle, then the debate over the authorship of various scenes and characters would have been much briefer and more definitive. Old Banks, one of the main agitators in the Frank

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<sup>15</sup>Onat 76.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Hattaway, "Women and Witchcraft: The Case of The Witch of Edmonton." Trivium 20: 55.

plotline, is Mother Sawyer's chief antagonist; the morris men serve not only as a "comic" line in the Cuddy Banks scenes, but also as a sort of Greek chorus in some of Mother Sawyer's scenes, reflecting whatever mentality or opinion is dominant at the time; Sir Arthur's is the word which eventually damns Mother Sawyer; and, above all, Cuddy Banks threads through the entire play. He stands on his own in the morris scene, but petitions Mother Sawyer for access to the world of the Carters and Banks. He also defends both Mother Sawyer and Tom from the verbal onslaught of the village. He provides a mild skepticism which hits home much more accurately than the Justice's legal arrogance. Cuddy is a bit of a simpleton, and so he belongs to the realm of the homely;<sup>17</sup> he suffers from the Devil's machinations, and so the audience can sympathise, even whilst laughing; his good heart and mildness make him proof against the Devil's wiles, and so the audience may, subtly or sub-consciously, find itself aligning itself with Cuddy's point of view. This is a master stroke. An audience may steel itself against the social truths bitterly and blatantly spouted by Mother Sawyer, but it may not be proof against the subtle, mild rationalism espoused by Cuddy Banks.

Mother Sawyer, even more than Frank Thorney, suffers from the parochial, isolated hierarchy of Edmonton. Hattaway notes that "the play goes out of its way to contrast Frank's self-pity and dithering panic with her determination to affirm her identity."<sup>18</sup> Hattaway condemns Frank too severely--he must achieve his inheritance if he is not to reduce himself, his wife, and his unborn child to "beggery and want; / Two Devils that are occasions to enforce / A shameful end,"<sup>19</sup> and to achieve his inheritance he must agree to wed Susan. The horror Frank feels at Carter's insistence on an immediate wedding can only be imagined, and his remorse at the proven goodness of Susan is apparent. The reason for Frank's "dithering" is that he has no

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<sup>17</sup>I mean "homely" in the British sense, or as in Freud's heimlich.

<sup>18</sup>Hattaway 57.

<sup>19</sup>I.i.18-20.



way out. His boyhood, servitude, adulthood, and death are all compassed by the borders of Edmonton, and cannot look beyond them. All of his actions can be read as an attempt to gain mastery of himself in a society where that mastery means becoming one of the elite, a voice of the established patriarchy. Robin Briggs states, "Servants occupied a marginal position in the household. . . .For both young men and young women, service represented a very prolonged liminal or marginal state prior to full adult independence, one from which it was important to emerge with a good reputation and some modest savings."<sup>20</sup> This is a sweeping generalisation, but it does apply to the world of The Witch of Edmonton. In addition, the "and" in the last sentence is all-powerful. Good reputation and money mean that ex-servants can become independent and join those who sought to suppress them and support the system by enforcing a subservient, menial role upon all those who do not fit the overarching definition of power. Without money, Frank must scheme; when his schemes go awry, he must flee. The one attempt he makes to flee is not only doomed to failure, but incidentally leads to his death, for in his desperation to get free he opens himself to the devil's temptations and kills Susan. And even in death he does not escape, for, as Old Carter notes, he follows Susan to Heaven, and thereby remains within an Edmonton setting even there.<sup>21</sup>

Frank believes himself a victim of circumstance, and constructs himself accordingly. In I.i, he asks the heavens to ruin him if he leaves Winnifride. Or rather, he puts external forces in the active, himself in the passive:

. . . when ever  
 The wanton heat of youth by subtle baits  
 Of beauty, or what womans Art can practice,  
 Draw me from onely loving thee, let Heaven  
 Inflict upon my life some fearful ruine.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbours (London: HarperCollins, 1996) 231.

<sup>21</sup>V.iii.115-16.

<sup>22</sup>I.i.63-67.

If he is "drawn," it is due not to himself, but to youth, or desire, or Art. Though the audience has no reason to distrust Frank's word at this stage, Frank still sets up an escape clause, exploiting the situation both he and Winnifride know. Outside forces shape him, mould him, and influence his only move. Conveniently, extension of this argument means that if he strays from the path of rightness, it is not his fault. His manipulation of the system shows he understands it. As he is male, he has a chance of reaching the top of it and benefitting from it.

His sex also means that, from the start, he benefits from some of the beliefs the patriarchy supports. Sir Arthur is a licentious man, deceiving those he can and reaping what he can from his position and his actions, lewd and otherwise. He catches Frank in Winnifride's arms. Frank asks him bluntly, "Alas, Sir / Am I a talker?"<sup>23</sup> Sir Arthur immediately accepts his silence. Here, Frank demonstrates that a man's loose sexuality is not bound up in his speech and utterance, as a woman's is. Susan, later in the play, stands apart from this convention. She clearly believes that a man's tongue denotes his morals, and for that reason she will have none of Warbeck (I.ii.94-97). Conversely, when Winnifride dares to stand against Sir Arthur, betraying him and trying to prove her worth, Sir Arthur derides her for false honesty: "Wilt thou turn monster now? art not asham'd / After so many months to be honest at last? / Away, away, fie on't."<sup>24</sup> Winnifride's dilemma is also encapsulated in Sir Arthur's speech: his favour is complicit with satisfaction of his desire. If Winnifride defies either his desire or his convenience, she runs foul of the local squire's displeasure, and will be labelled a whore despite the fact that she is now an honest woman.

Off-stage, before the play begins, Winnifride is an unruly woman, using sex, it is implied, to get what favours she can once she is no longer a maiden. When she falls in love, however, she cedes to both her own desire and Frank's (Sir Arthur terms

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<sup>23</sup>I.i.148-49.

<sup>24</sup>I.i.193-95.



this "unruly lust" at I.i.92), and dares to dream of escape from her servitude. She gives herself to Frank and conceives a child by him. However, on stage, she behaves just as she ought, with demure, even wifely obedience of Frank's wishes, as the first scene shows, even when Frank hurries her from one man's aegis to another's--she is sent to the mysterious, never-seen "Unkle Selman." This man is Frank's confidant; it must be assumed he supports Frank, for Frank tells him "all at large."<sup>25</sup> Winnifride also cross-dresses. Whereas in another character or play (such as Luce 2 in The Wise-woman of Hogsdon), this would be seen as unruliness, in Winnifride it is obedience, done at Frank's behest: "For your sake I put on / A shape that's false," she reminds him in IV.i.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, fulfilling even the strictest patriarch's dreams, she takes upon herself the fault of her unruliness. Rather than blaming Sir Arthur, her seducer, she blames herself for her own folly and for seducing Sir Arthur from the straight and narrow: "I have been much to blame. Had not my Lewdness / Given way to your immoderate waste of Vertue, / You had not with such eagerness pursu'd / The error of your goodness."<sup>27</sup> Sir Arthur likes this interpretation; he says to Winnifride, "It becomes thee."<sup>28</sup> It is not the true interpretation, however; this is demonstrated by the violence of Sir Arthur's reaction when she stands against him, and her desire to leave him in the first place. Nevertheless, Winnifride takes it as the basis for her repentance, and proves herself both true lover and righteous right-thinker in her speeches in the play. Because of this, at the end of the play, she takes Susan's place as dutiful daughter.

Susan is generally held to be the paragon of all virtues, even down to the virtue of martyrdom. However, she tries to apply equality of speech interpretation, as mentioned above, and earns her martyrdom at the hands of a man who cannot stand

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<sup>25</sup>I.i.38-39.

<sup>26</sup>71-72.

<sup>27</sup>I.i.163-66.

<sup>28</sup>I.i.169.

her expressions of desire and sexuality. "Susan, the paragon of wifely patience and humility," states Viviana Comensoli, "dies, like Mother Sawyer, at the moment when she is most assertive. The link between witchcraft and assertive women was frequently drawn by Protestant commentators."<sup>29</sup> In addition, Comensoli believes,

Susan's passion shocks and confuses Frank, whose response embodies two cardinal contemporary notions of ideal male and female behavior: he denies Susan's sexuality by viewing her as an emblem of chastity, and he upholds the husband's duty to command by instructing his wife on how to be decorous. Before Susan reveals her passion, Frank cannot even contemplate her death. . . .As a paragon of modesty, Susan is exempt from mutability; as a flesh-and-blood woman, Susan, like Mother Sawyer . . . pays dearly for her humanity.<sup>30</sup>

Mutability, the challenge to stasis and status quo, is what threatens any establishment; any who serve the establishment must act against it. Purkiss posits the theory that, "In The Witch of Edmonton, Dekker, Ford and Rowley focus on Sawyer's ability to shift the boundaries between animal and human for the entire village. Her idea of a witch is someone close to animals."<sup>31</sup> Sir Arthur's reaction to Mother Sawyer's accusations are that of an animal at bay. Frank, with the aid of the devil/dog, devolves ever more into a cornered animal acting on instinct. These instincts are triggered when Susan sets aside the veneer which covers her modesty and reveals herself, too, to be a creature of appetite, though the play attaches no stigma to her, as she believes she is acting within the bounds of marriage.

Susan, afraid of losing Frank to his strange distraction, fears that it might be due to her sexual inexperience, and dares to say so: "I am young . . . strange to those contents / A wife should offer." Worse still, from Frank's point of view, she continues: "Say in but what I fail, / I'll study satisfaction."<sup>32</sup> Frank bids her stay her

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<sup>29</sup>Viviana Comensoli, "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy in The Witch of Edmonton," The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe, eds. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989) 46.

<sup>30</sup>Comensoli 57.

<sup>31</sup>Purkiss 241-42.



tongue: "[M]aintain no more dispute, / For where thou speakst, it's fit all tongues be mute."<sup>33</sup> However, she refuses to "tie up" her speech, and with it her sexuality, demanding kisses in III.ii from an ever-more ill-at-ease Frank. Frank kills her in this central, pivotal act; ironically, act III is the only act since her introduction in which Mother Sawyer does not appear. Her absence, and the presence of the Dog at Frank's murder scene, argue for an interpretation in which the authors believe Frank to be far more the central villain than Mother Sawyer.

As Frank is trapped within society, Mother Sawyer is trapped on its borders, and forced into a role she neither merits nor wants. She has no wealth or recourse-- she lives in a hovel and is forbidden by Banks even to pick up "a few rotten sticks" for fuel.<sup>34</sup> We can deduce that once she was not as badly off as she was now. Cuddy refers to her as a "motherly woman," an attempt to put her back into the realm of the homely from the liminal world where she has become, as Hattaway notes, "a figure of the inversion of the dominant values of her society."<sup>35</sup> And although one may interpret Sawyer's reference to "the Ghost of my dear love,"<sup>36</sup> as meaning the Tom of weeks gone by, it may also refer to a departed husband, and thus echo, as Onat notes, Frank's hallucination in an earlier scene.<sup>37</sup>

When Mother Sawyer first appears, she is "in a field outside Old Banks's house."<sup>38</sup> Yet this field must be near woods for it to make gathering sticks at all

<sup>32</sup>II.ii.81-84.

<sup>33</sup>II.ii.107-08.

<sup>34</sup>II.i.21.

<sup>35</sup>Hattaway 56.

<sup>36</sup>V.i.35.

<sup>37</sup>Onat 363. Although as Onat notes [*passim*] Dekker pays great attention to the detail of the Goodcole pamphlet, there are omissions in the main action of the play which are reinstated slant-wise at other moments. Hence though Sawyer's aversion to Ratcliffe comes because of the sow incident, the brooms which Banks refused are omitted; the teat which Sawyer gives Tom is on her arm, yet Goodcole makes mention of the teat being near "her fundament" (Onat 392-93), and Cuddy rebukes Tom because he will "creep under an old Witches Coats, and suck like a great Puppy" (V.i.173). Goodcole mentions Sawyer's husband, but though Mother Sawyer is "a motherly woman," she has no husband.

worthwhile. Possibly the woods and common lands around have been recently enclosed, so that she is forced to gather her firewood on what Old Banks terms "my ground."<sup>39</sup> Likewise, in other scenes, she appears in (the same?) field, on the village green, where all ranks mingle, or in a location not specified, or ambiguous.<sup>40</sup> In the final act, she appears on her way to the gallows--in the final act of transition, from life to death. She is firmly liminal. As an old woman, past the age of childbearing, she can be considered both as a non-productive member of society (though the actual Elizabeth Sawyer made brooms for a living, we see no occupation for the textual Sawyer), and as a threatening one, with no constraints of marriage, and only nebulous laws concerning her.<sup>41</sup> The play, too, is a liminal entity. R. Malcolm Smuts observes that the theatre and the city around it were places where social boundaries broke down. His statement, "No firm social or geographic boundaries ever separated the court from other fashionable milieus [sic] in the capital, since court society was never contained within a single building or confined to a narrow coterie," suggests the possibility of early Stuart courtiers going to the theatre, as we know members of the Caroline court did later.<sup>42</sup> In addition to these potential audience members, for whom "the royal cult included the fashionable lore of Hermeticism, Petrarchanism, and classical mythology,"<sup>43</sup> city playwrights could expect a broad spectrum of attendees:

They probably drew their largest clientele from the Inns of Court, but they also attracted gentry visiting the city, merchants and professional men, and even a few shopkeepers and artisans aping the habits of the

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<sup>38</sup>Onat 295.

<sup>39</sup>II.i.20.

<sup>40</sup>Onat passim.

<sup>41</sup>Most witches brought to trial in Britain, and especially England, were in similar circumstances. See C. L'Estrange Ewen, ed., Witch Hunting and Witch Trials (1929; London: Muller, 1971); Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge, 1970); Christine Lerner, Enemies of God (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981) et al. for detailed studies.

<sup>42</sup>R. Malcolm Smuts, Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England (Philadelphia, PA: UPP [sic], 1987) 55.

<sup>43</sup>Smuts 18.



elite. The indoor theaters prospered because play-going had become as much a part of the London scene as fashionable clothes and political gossip. The dramatists who wrote for them had to please a well-to-do but large and heterogeneous public with assertive tastes.<sup>44</sup>

This spectrum was what allowed playwrights such as Dekker to deal with current sensational news items, but also to manipulate them to arouse people's sympathies, and subtly argue for change.

The 1621 case of Elizabeth Sawyer was one such sensation. For a multiplicity of reasons, Mother Sawyer, like any witch, is dangerous. None of the reasons, however, are personal ones, though her perceived (or in the play, actual) assaults are. Mother Sawyer realises she is the inversion Hattaway claims she is. Her first bitter, wondering speech begins,

And why on me? why should the envious world  
 Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?  
 'Cause I am poor, deform'd and ignorant?  
 And like a Bow buckl'd and bent together,  
 By some more strong in mischief then my self?  
 Must I for that be made a common sink,  
 For all the filth and rubbish of Men's tongues  
 To fall and run into?<sup>45</sup>

"Envious" in this extract must mean "malicious" or "spiteful" (OED), unless Dekker is engaging in double entendre--not an unlikely prospect. The world envies those with power. Witches have power, and therefore are a threat to those who either are powerless, or who see witches' power as a threat to their own. Not just the scapegoated, undesirable burdens of community were accused. Sexual "deviants" were commonly cried out, or sexual deviance was added to the list of crimes. In The Witch of Edmonton, the link between the two is demonstrated when old Banks calls Mother Sawyer a "hot Whore," and both threatens Mother Sawyer sexually and expresses his contempt for her with the question, "[M]ust we fetch you with fire in

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<sup>44</sup>Smuts 63.

<sup>45</sup>II.i.1-8.

your tail?"<sup>46</sup> All sorts of complex community interworking were uncovered and expressed in the historical trials through the spiraling accusation "network." The play shows us the politics of a mini-society which threatens to crack completely under the weight of its bare truths, only barely, after death takes its toll, managing to shore itself up and continue.

Ironically in The Witch of Edmonton, this political significance is the result of outside agency, and has nothing to do with Elizabeth Sawyer. It is the village who, by their insistent scapegoating, torment and, in the end, unswerving belief in Mother Sawyer's witchery, turn her into a real witch. At the beginning more sinned against than sinning, and not necessarily believing in the diabolical pact herself,<sup>47</sup> Mother Sawyer in despair turns to the devil to "affirm her identity," as Hattaway notes.

"Some call me witch," opines Mother Sawyer in II.i,

And being ignorant of my self, they go  
About to teach me how to be one: urging,  
That my bad tongue (by their bad usage made so)  
Forespeaks their Cattle, doth bewitch their Corn,  
Themselves, their Servants, and their Babes at nurse.  
This they enforce upon me: and in part  
Make me credit to it.<sup>48</sup>

Usage and belief here clearly form reality and definition, even more so later in the scene when Sawyer gives up and cries, "'Tis all one, / To be a Witch, as to be counted one."<sup>49</sup>

In this scene Dekker cleverly places blame on Banks' head. Taking into account the view discussed above that the devil is responsible for the action, the following passage must be seen in a new light:

<sup>46</sup>IV.i.24.

<sup>47</sup>The phrase "some say" in II.i.101 implies that she does not herself believe that the devil suckles his witches.

<sup>48</sup>8-15.

<sup>49</sup>II.i.114-15.



. . . would some power good or bad  
 Instruct me which way I might be reveng'd  
 Upon this churl. . . so I might work  
 Revenge upon this Miser, this black Cur,  
 That barks, and bites, and sucks the very blood  
 Of me, and of my credit.<sup>50</sup>

This language explicitly makes a devil of Banks, who here has all the attributes of Dog Tom, the black familiar who confirms Mother Sawyer in her diabolic pact. In this light, Cuddy's subsequent disowning of his father in II.i.200 is a dramatic precursor to his disowning the devil.

Mother Sawyer maintains her clarity of vision throughout the play, even when she has abdicated herself to the devil and the "Fury" she invokes. In IV.i she underlines the hypocrisy of society as a whole, and gets both Sir Arthur and the Justice to agree that courtiers are just as unruly, nay more, than she, and more of a threat politically, economically, and morally:

What are your painted things in Princes Courts?  
 Upon whose Eye-lids Lust sits blowing fires  
 To burn Mens Souls in sensual hot desires:  
 Upon whose naked Paps, a Leachers thought  
 Acts Sin in fouler shapes then can be wrought. . .  
 These, by Inchantments, can whole Lordships change  
 To Trunks of rich Attire: turn Ploughs and Teams  
 To Flanders Mares and Coaches; and huge trains  
 Of servitors, to a French butter-flie.  
 Have you not City-witches who can turn  
 Their husbands wares, whole standing shops of wares,  
 To sumptuous Tables, Garden of stoln sin?  
 In one yeer wasting, what scarce twenty win.  
 Are not these witches?<sup>51</sup>

Both the Justice and Sir Arthur, though they agree with her accusations, attempt to maintain that Mother Sawyer's acts are the worse for her diabolical pact, and state that the law ignores them. Mother Sawyer of course sees why: they are young, beautiful,

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<sup>50</sup>II.i.103-14.

<sup>51</sup>IV.i.103-17.

rich, and though they dance upon the golden road to Hell, their diablerie goes unnoticed:

Reverence once  
 Had wont to wait on age. Now an old woman  
 Ill favour'd grown with years, if she be poor,  
 Must be call'd Bawd or Witch. Such so abus'd  
 Are the course Witches: t'other are the fine,  
 Spun for the Devil's own wearing.<sup>52</sup>

She rages against scolds and lawyers as well. It is then that Sir Arthur makes his fatal mistake, and we see most clearly the machine of accusation at work. He accuses Mother Sawyer of killing men, children, and cows. This accusation is so shocking that it interrupts Mother Sawyer in mid-tirade.<sup>53</sup> She breaks off her raging anathema to ask, "Am I accus'd for such a one?" and when Sir Arthur replies in the affirmative, accuses Sir Arthur of lust-witchery:

Dare any swear I ever tempted Maiden  
 With golden hooks flung at her chastity,  
 To come and lose her honour? and being lost,  
 To pay not a Denier for't? Some slaves have done it.  
 Men-witches can without the Fangs of Law,  
 Drawing once one drop of blood, put counterfeit pieces  
 Away for true Gold.<sup>54</sup>

Dekker does not make it clear whether this shrewd summing up of Sir Arthur's lust and avarice is this result of demonic knowledge or shrewd observation. Though witches were reputed to have access to knowledge of things mortal beings were not meant to know, within the very first scene of the play the audience is given more than enough evidence to draw the conclusions that Mother Sawyer does. However, her summation of the truth damns her, for, reacting to protect his own self-image and power-base, Sir Arthur exclaims "By one thing she speaks, / I know now she's a

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<sup>52</sup>IV.i.119-23.

<sup>53</sup>One must note that even in the recital of Tom's actions, murder is not among them, nor of man nor of beast. Though Tom drives Agnes mad, Mother Sawyer denies her agency (as did Elizabeth Sawyer in actuality); and Mother Sawyer, of course, has nothing to do with Susan's murder.

<sup>54</sup>IV.i.138-43.



Witch, and dare no longer / Hold conference with the Fury"<sup>55</sup> and persuades the Justice to leave.

Sir Arthur's speech here is problematic. On the one hand, by stating that the last speech of Mother Sawyer's is what truly convinced him she was a witch, when he had been maintaining that all along, Sir Arthur is admitting to the truth of her words—he is as much as witch as she. On the other hand, by his choice of language he confirms her demonic possession, for the word "Fury" recalls II.i, in which Mother Sawyer cries "I'd go out of my self / And give this Fury leave to dwell within / This ruin'd Cottage. . . ."<sup>56</sup> This issue is complicated still further by the realisation that whilst "Fury" can refer either to the passion or to one of Tisiphone's company in the earlier instance, in IV.i it can only refer to one of the Erinyes. The Furies were Hades' avenging "angels;" they tormented those who sinned, particularly against family or community, or who showed o'erweening pride. If Mother Sawyer is indeed a Fury, then she is in the right, demonstrating others' sins. And if Mother Sawyer is indeed a Fury, then here is the Classical reference which Onat claimed is absent from The Witch of Edmonton, and which, along with her eloquence (which many critics have noted and claimed not to be "in character," but which they have forgiven as authorial licence), puts her back in the hag tradition which Dipsas, Duessa and company inhabit.

The first scene of Act Four is pivotal in more ways than one. It not only reveals the hidden witches in society, but also underlines the fickleness of society and its willingness to shift with the wind to protect itself. Though Onat claims that the countrymen who enter with Banks in IV.i are distinct from the morris dancers, it is more probable, given the carefully contained area of the play, that they are, as Baskerville believes, the morris men who appear in the first scene of the previous two acts. In III.i, which is the scene in which Cuddy avows "I'll have a Witch; I love a

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<sup>55</sup>IV.i.144-46.

<sup>56</sup>II.i.105-07.

Witch," the first morris man says, "Faith, Witches themselves are so common now adays, that the counterfeit will not be regarded. They say we have three or four in Edmonton, besides Mother Sawyer."<sup>57</sup> In a circumstance in which witches are "lovely," or even commonplace, there is no censure, and they are all acknowledged. When chaos threatens, however, the erstwhile proliferation of witches coalesces into a scapegoat. One act later, that same man cries "what Witch have we about us, but Mother Sawyer?"<sup>58</sup>

The accusations spouted in IV.i are patently ridiculous; it requires the most self-deceiving of minds to believe the men. They are meant to be ridiculous, for they are the one instance in which Dekker deviates substantially from the Goodcole pamphlet. Onat notes that the dun cow incident comes directly from Gifford,<sup>59</sup> and that,

For most of the accusations made by the countrymen in this scene . . . there is no direct hint in the source [Goodcole], and their inclusion is important in relation to the treatment of the witchcraft material in the play. Although they were undoubtedly inserted in part to amuse the audience, these accusations. . .at the same time serve to spice the play with the moderate rationalism found in the works of the German physician Johann Wier and the English non-conformist preacher George Gifford.<sup>60</sup>

In the last scene of the play, M<sup>o</sup>ther Sawyer comes across as easily the most realistic of characters. Where Frank, Winnifride, Banks, Carter, and the rest of the characters from that plot thread devolve into noble and self-sacrificing speeches, Mother Sawyer's "What would you have? cannot a poor old woman / Have your leave to die without vexation?" cuts across and injects realism, and if it is bitter and crotchety realism, then it is deservedly so. Mother Sawyer, like Frank, would like to

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<sup>57</sup>10; 11-13.

<sup>58</sup>IV.i. 8-9.

<sup>59</sup>340.

<sup>60</sup>Onat 337.



think that whatever has happened, she will escape the circles into which she has been trapped, and Edmonton is loath to let her go.

Despite her weariness, however, she still has breath for one last truth. Old Carter demands whether she has bewitched Frank or no, for "he could never have don't without the Devil." Mother Sawyer replies "Who doubts it? but is every devil mine?"<sup>61</sup> At the last, she is a mouthpiece for truth, a mirror in which society should see itself. Many devils are discovered in the play, not least Old Banks, Old Carter (who drives his son to sin), and Sir Arthur, otherwise respectable members of the village. But their devils are hidden--Tom cannot touch Old Banks, for example, for Banks is only out of charity with Mother Sawyer, and at peace with the village as a whole. Mother Sawyer's capacity to see clearly is born of her status as a disorderly or liminal woman, and also from the wisdom age (and bitterness) can bring. But The Witch of Edmonton shows clearly in what danger innocence and honesty place her. She is less literate than her "high" literary sisters. Elizabeth Sawyer, according to Goodcole, was illiterate, and could neither read nor speak Latin.<sup>62</sup> Though there is little hope that Dekker's Sawyer was educated, and she claims in II.i.3 to be "ignorant," she does manage to manipulate the Latin phrase given her, and claims "I'm an expert scholar; / Speak Latine, or I know not well what language, / As well as the best of 'em" (II.i.177-79). As this claim occurs after she has made her devilish bargain, one may assume that it is the devil's knowledge which fills her, as her having previous knowledge of Latin is highly unlikely. However, by appropriation of Latin, traditionally a learned man's tongue, she both proves herself the male devil's lackey (he would have access to fluent Latin) and an unruly woman, taking for herself what should be a scholar's. Scholars, of course, are male, and most contemporary plays which demonstrate plays on Latin do so through the use of true and false scholars

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<sup>61</sup>V.iii.26-28.

<sup>62</sup>Onat 395.

(witness Sir Tophas and the pages).<sup>63</sup> Mother Sawyer has no recourse to this, to classical magics like Dipsas', or to prophecy, but she still manages to make her audience look upon itself, not as it would be seen, but as it is.

Larry S. Champion notes that the first performance of The Witch of Edmonton was a court performance by the Prince's company, on December 29, 1621.<sup>64</sup> Holding up a mirror which reveals huge cracks in the substance of the viewers could have been dangerous. The play uses three techniques to alleviate suspected sedition. The monarch is never criticised. The second is borrowed from Goodcole: Dekker robs Mother Sawyer of a scaffold repentance. In fact, Sawyer's last words, "Have I scarce breath enough to say my Prayers? / And would you force me to spend that in bawling? / Bear witness, I repent all former evil; / There is no damned Conjurer like the Devil" (V.iii.48-51) lack conviction, being resigned grumblings. Frank's repentance supersedes Sawyer's exit, and his scaffold speech and change of heart enable as happy a resolution as possible for the living. Lastly, Dekker uses a technique which calls to mind the tactics of the medieval dream narrative. As a dream cannot be disproved, and as the author of a dream-narrative can plead of a shady opinion that (s)he is "only" reporting what happened in a dream, so Dekker distances himself from his creation. After all, Mother Sawyer is the villain. And she dies, having been justly tried. Therefore Dekker can claim, should he need to, that she and her opinions get exactly what they should have received, and that if the reader or audience goes away with the "wrong" impression, the fault rests with the reader or audience. It is a cunning and almost downright subversive way to express political views. And one can see it, too, as Dekker's last political statement in the play. Society sees witches as expendable bodies, scapegoats for sins exterior to them. He shows Mother Sawyer for what she is: an expendable body which reflects upon a larger body politic.

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<sup>63</sup>For further discussion of a witch using Latin, see chapter 8.

<sup>64</sup>Larry S. Champion, "Factions of Distempered Passions': The Development of John Ford's Tragic Vision in The Witch of Edmonton and The Lover's Melancholy," 'Concord in Discord': The Plays of John Ford, 1586-1986, ed. Donald K. Anderson Jr. (New York: AMS P, 1986) 112.



CHAPTER 5. JEANNE LA PUCELLE--POWER AND ITS LEGACY IN SHAKESPEARE'S 1 HENRY 6

*The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.*  
-Deut. 22:5

Phyllis Rackin believes, "Joan in 1 Henry VI is the prototype for the marginal and criminal status of the women in the Henry VI plays and also for their subversive, theatrical energy. Her very subversiveness, however, authorizes her dramatic power."<sup>1</sup> Joan is certainly an unruly woman, a virago, even more of a threat than Spenser's Britomart, for she does not quest for resolution through marriage. Rather, Joan seeks to invade and settle the political scene, itself a male-dominated and male controlled arena, as the first scene in The First Part of King Henry VI (hereafter 1 Henry 6) demonstrates; and she seeks to do so by means of martial prowess and victory, both of which men traditionally regard as their own prerogatives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Shakespeare's Joan is based upon an undisputed historical figure, which removes some of the protective distance between her and the audience. She is not presented as fiction, any more than Shakespeare's historical kings are. Her portrayal, however, despite its physical, verbal, and imagistic power, seems uneven. For the French, she is the holy Maid throughout the play; for the English, the now-familiar duo of whore and sorceress. In fact, as Anthony Harris observes, "There is little indication in the early scenes that Joan is a witch; in fact her patriotism and courage are given due emphasis, whilst, on the English side, it is her supposed harlotry rather than her

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<sup>1</sup>Phyllis Rackin, "Engendering the Tragic Audience: the Case of Richard III," Studies in the Literary Imagination 26 (1993): 52.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew S. Cairncross, ed., The First Part of King Henry VI, Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1962). Hereafter 1 Henry 6 in text and 1H6 in notes. All references to the play from this edition. All references to Hall from this edition unless noted otherwise.

indulgence in occult practices that is stressed."<sup>3</sup> One must remember that the play is an English history play; however, Shakespeare's Joan is both a complex, complicated character and a fragmented one--heretrix of both sides of the English/French debate about her nature, and the philosophical debate over the nature of women, specifically the virago or Amazon. To an extent, she is also a reflection of the contemporary concerns about women in political power.

In 1590, when Shakespeare was writing The First Part of King Henry VI, and no doubt at least partially in response to the odd societal ambivalence created by having a powerful female monarch, England, and particularly metropolitan England, was witnessing a physical, "stylish" manifestation of sexual confusion.

"Transvestitism is for us," notes Stephen Orgel, "male to female. For the Renaissance it was - normatively, so to speak - female to male. . ."<sup>4</sup> The most well-known complaint against male impersonators was made by King James I, but, as Juliet Dusinberre observes, cross-dressing, weapons-bearing women were "not peculiar to the Jacobean period; women had been causing comment by wearing men's clothes from the 1580's onward."<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare uses transvestite women in other plays, but unlike, for example, Viola and Rosalind (and unlike Spenser's Britomart or Thomas Heywood's Second Luce in The Wise-woman of Hogsdon), Joan does not pretend to be male. By not bothering with the charade of changing sex, Joan acts as a focus for anxieties about usurpation of what the patriarchy saw as normal and exclusive male rights and characteristics.

Simultaneously, and continuing through the seventeenth century, a literary debate defended and attacked women's virtues and rights. Both men and women contributed to the argument, much as they had done to the "Querelle de la Rose" in

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<sup>3</sup>Anthony Harris, Night's Black Agents (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980) 30.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Orgel, "The Subtexts of The Roaring Girl," Erotic Politics, ed. Susan Zimmerman (London: Routledge, 1992) 16.

<sup>5</sup>Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (1975; London: Macmillan, 1996) 7.



the previous century. Some apologists are surprisingly "modern" in their thinking: that same Agrippa who produced magical treatises argues for sexual equality in his De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foemenei Sexus (Latin editions in 1529 and 1531), which was translated into English in 1542 by Clapham as A Treatise of the Nobilitie and excellencye of woman kynde. Agrippa recognises that the true enemy of women was male supremacy itself, and not misogyny or misogynist literature,<sup>6</sup> although as discussed in chapter 1 even he was bound by societal dilemmas. Christine de Pisan's spirited The Boke of the Cyte of Ladies appears in English in 1521.<sup>7</sup> Often formulaic and almost always highly rhetorical, both attacks and apologies utilise exempla--women from the past who were outstanding in some way--as their illustrations. Sometimes these women are biblical (Judith, Deborah, Esther, the witch of Endor); but more often they are classical or (semi-)historical. Linda Woodbridge notes,

The most important single source of classical exempla used in the formal controversy between 1540 and 1620 is Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus (Concerning Famous Women), a mid-fourteenth-century collection of 104 brief biographies of women. Included here are misogynists' favorites like Deianira and Clytemnestra; defenders' favorites from the common trio Ceres-Minerva-Carmenta to regulars like the Sybils, the Amazons, Penelope, Sappho, Lucrece, Portia, Zenobia, Dido and Veturia; and a few examples employed with equal dexterity by attackers and defenders--Semiramis, Medea, Cleopatra. Boccaccio's ambivalent treatment of the third group facilitated their use by both sides: he emphasizes Semiramis's remarkable administrative and military talents as well as her monstrous sexuality, Medea's great skill in magic as well as her murderous inclinations. . . .<sup>8</sup>

In 1590, too, English patriotism was still riding the great wave created by the defeat of the Armada in 1588, and Alençon's suit for the hand of Elizabeth I was certainly well within memory. Into this atmosphere, then, Shakespeare introduced 1

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<sup>6</sup>Linda Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1984) 38 ff. Woodbridge notes wryly, however, that "even male defenders of women were expected to be ladylike" (16). See chapter 1 for further discussion on Agrippa.

<sup>7</sup>Woodbridge 16.

<sup>8</sup>Woodbridge 15.

Henry 6, and in that play, Joan of Arc, a woman who, like the exempla, excels by far the common boundaries of her sex; but who, unlike the exempla, is not safely distanced by time and culture.

Critical attitudes to Joan differ, often according to era. Andrew Cairncross comments that 1 Henry 6 was originally a great success, but as time progresses it becomes an abomination, not least because of its treatment of Joan. Nowadays, Cairncross says, opinion is reverting to its Tudor origin. He avers, "An outstanding example of the change of interpretation may be seen in the attitude to Joan. She is now no longer the 'simple and heroic maid', nor St. Joan. Shakespeare, it is recognized, took Joan as he found her in Hall and Holinshed, and did no more than reflect the current English attitude."<sup>9</sup> Gabriele Bernhard Jackson observes that "most critics agree in calling [Joan] a coarse caricature, an exemplar of authorial chauvinism both national and sexual."<sup>10</sup> David Bevington claims that Joan is "unsympathetically portrayed as a wanton and trafficker in evil spirits."<sup>11</sup> Joan's character, however, lies somewhere in the middle of these views, partaking of a bit of each, but never wholly of any.

The complex and even problematic nature of Shakespeare's Joan evidences itself in the relative paucity of material written on her. Though much work has been done on the historical Joan and on other literary Joans, few tackle Shakespeare's.<sup>12</sup> Even Dusi Berre, who dedicates a chapter to women who hold authority, does not mention her. Ostensibly, Joan is, from the outset and throughout the play, a witch, a

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<sup>9</sup>1H6 xxxix - xl.

<sup>10</sup>Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, "Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," English Literary Renaissance 18.1 (1988): 40.

<sup>11</sup>David Bevington, "Shakespeare the Elizabethan Dramatist," A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, eds. Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971) 131.

<sup>12</sup> In my trips to the BL, I was unable to obtain the Cambridge World Shakespeare Bibliography. I have extensively used all else that was available.



deceiver, a "dame" or beldame, a "trull," and the French who believe in her are misguided, ill-advised, and inferior to the English in general, and Talbot in particular. However, this is an entirely English point of view, and only comes to dominate the image of Joan in the last two scenes of the play, as will be shown. Though Joan's character in Act V undergoes such a change in attitude, action, and manner of speech as to render her unbelievable, Cairncross alleges,

Nor is there. . .any inconsistency in the presentation of Joan. Leo Kirschbaum has clearly shown that the 'holy' and 'divine' Joan, as she appears to the French, is, even to them, treated with consistent irony. . . .The 'holy' Joan of I.ii.55-7, for example, is, as he notes, negated by the pagan reference. Expressions such as 'She takes upon her bravely at first dash' are deliberately slangy and cynical.<sup>13</sup>

The pagan reference here is to the Sibyls. Joan is also referred to as an Amazon in I.ii.104, and in I.vi.4 as "Divinest creature, Astraea's daughter." That these pagan references negate any claim to Christian excellence is absurd. The Sibyls are exempla; the Amazon reference is paired with a comparison to biblical Deborah (also exempla); and no less a figure than Elizabeth Tudor claimed Astraea, Cynthia, and Tuccia as her opposites. "She takes upon her bravely at first dash," whilst slangy, reflects not necessarily cynicism (though, granted, Joan has not yet proven her martial prowess), but the sort of dash apportioned to the role of the roaring girl.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, in the pagan references to Joan one should find warnings of the complexity of her representation. By calling Joan "Astraea's daughter," Shakespeare deliberately links her with Elizabeth I. Leah Marcus claims, "In 1 Henry 6, Joan La Pucelle functions in many ways as a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth I. . . .The figure of Joan brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties about the Virgin Queen, her identity, and her capacity to provide continuing stability for the nation. Elizabeth was loved by her subjects, but also feared and sometimes hated."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>1H6 xl.

<sup>14</sup>Though the roaring girl is a topos in and of herself, this study unfortunately lacks the space to discuss her. I refer the reader to, among others, Stephen Orgel's essay.

As Joan is definitely linked, for whatever purpose, with Elizabeth, sloughing her off without granting her any redeeming qualities is therefore politically dangerous.

Marcus warns against getting too entangled in the Elizabeth/Joan parallel, but correctly notes what may be a safety mechanism: "What needs to be emphasized, however, is their [the speculations on parallel] half-formed, equivocal nature."<sup>16</sup>

Equivocality, the capability of acting on both sides of an argument and believing in both arguments, is a highly necessary trait for those who wish to understand Joan from a critical point of view.

On the other hand, and more simply, a great hero is lessened if the evil he combats is not at least as great as himself. Here then lies the riddle which must be unraveled. 1 Henry 6 is a vehicle for Talbot, the English hero. He alone does not get involved in the petty bickering and vicious politics going on in England; he is a patriot for his country's and his King's sake, rather than for power's; he is martyred in the battle against the French, and dies in a pieta-like scene, holding the dead body of his son. If, as Cairncross reminds readers, Joan's statement "thy hour is not yet come" (I.v.13) harks to John 7:30, then Talbot is even set up as a Jesus analogue.<sup>17</sup> In the presence of such a strong force for the English, Shakespeare needs someone to play against Talbot, in both dramatic structure and dialogue. Jackson notes that "for its presentation of Talbot's national and sexual opposites, the three Frenchwomen who are the play's only female characters, it draws heavily on the current controversy about the nature of women and on the interrelated types of the Amazon, the warrior woman, the cross-dressing woman, and the witch."<sup>18</sup> The Countess of Auvergne appears in only one scene, II.iii, in which she tries to capture Talbot and is outwitted.

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<sup>15</sup>Leah S. Marcus, Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 53. In this light, the fact that the English, not the French, are more cynical of Joan's virginity is telling.

<sup>16</sup>Marcus 83.

<sup>17</sup>1H6 32. Jesus was not arrested in the Temple, for "his hour was not yet come."

<sup>18</sup>Jackson 44.



This scene shows Talbot in the ascendant: it erases the memory of his previous capture (for Talbot starts the play in captivity, as Joan ends it), and proves he can no longer be imprisoned. In this again he contrasts with Joan, who is taken (in the play at least) at Angiers. Margaret in some ways, including wit, becomes Joan's successor.<sup>19</sup> As Cairncross notes, "It is no accident that, as one captured French 'enchantress' is led off prisoner, another, her direct successor, is led on, 'prisoner'."<sup>20</sup> However, Margaret's main role lies in the rest of Shakespeare's tetralogy.

Structurally, then, all women in the play depend on Joan or play against her: II.iii also indirectly praises Joan, for where the Countess' schemes fail, Joan's succeed.

On the most basic of levels, then, Joan is Talbot's parallel and foil. She must be elevated to make her worthy of being defeated, and then debased so that she can be defeated; she must on a very simple level end up the villain because she is French and the French are, after all, the villains of the piece; she must also be removed so that the stage is physically and metaphorically clear for Margaret. But the extent to which she is vilified and the depths to which Shakespeare unconvincingly has her sink have their roots in deeper soils, and to go beyond the most basic interpretation, one must realise in Joan more than just Talbot's opposite.

Joan is truly a virago, a woman "strong beyond the conventional expectations of her sex and thus said to be of a masculine spirit," as Jackson explains. She also notes that "The term was almost entirely positive and denoted either physical or spiritual prowess."<sup>21</sup> Alone of all the characters in the play, she is simple, humble, noble, down-to-earth, dryly witty, clever, and practical. She claims merely to be an agent of God; her schemes to take cities are clever and efficacious; her wit is shown in her conversations with Talbot; and her nobility in her eulogy of Talbot and his son.

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<sup>19</sup>See succeeding chapter.

<sup>20</sup>1H6 114. Cairncross also points out that there is a direct structural parallel between the words "felling hag" and 2H6 III.ii. 42.

<sup>21</sup>Jackson 49.

Throughout the play she cuts through panic and bias to solve the problem to hand: recouping losses when ousted from Orléans; ridding herself of dead bodies at the same time as she realises the nobility of spirit that once inhabited them; trying by any sensible scheme to stay her execution. In fact, until Act V, she is perhaps one of the most believable characters in the play, despite the dichotomy of imagery applied to her by English and French.

In order to understand this dichotomy, one must first have a brief understanding of the ways in which both countries portrayed Jeanne La Pucelle. The major literary records or chronicles that exist are as follows: on the French side, first and foremost, the Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc by Christine de Pisan, written in July of 1429 from Christine's abbey retreat;<sup>22</sup> the Mistère du Siège d'Orléans, composed in the mid-fifteenth century; and De l'estat et mercy des affaires de France, published in 1570 and considered by Régine Pernoud to be the first French public history.<sup>23</sup> On the English side, the three authors whose names come most easily to the tongue are Hall, Holinshed, and Shakespeare. Hall is firmly anti-Joan; Holinshed presents a more complicated issue, for the original 1577 version is vastly different from the 1587 account. Shakespeare himself is heir to this trouble, which by his time was endemic on both sides of the Channel. However, discussion must begin with French sources, for Joan was French, and all histories and chronicles that came after her are necessarily affected by her nationality as well as her circumstances. In addition, the English were aware of the French histories. Appendix A prints in comparative format relevant extracts from the two versions of Holinshed. In the first column virtually all of the writing on Joan from the 1577 edition has been reproduced.<sup>24</sup> The second

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<sup>22</sup>Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty, eds., Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc (Oxford: SSMLL, 1977). Hereafter the Ditié when referring to the Pisan text, and Kennedy and Varty when referring to critical matter in the edition. All references to this edition.

<sup>23</sup>Régine Pernoud, J'ai nom Jeanne la Pucelle (N.p.: Gallimard, 1994) *passim*.

<sup>24</sup>Raphael Holinshed, The Laste Volume of the Chronicles of Englande, Scotlande, and Irelande (London: 1577); Nicoll, Allardyce and Josephine, eds. Holinshed's Chronicle As Used in Shakespeare's Plays (1927; London: Everyman-Dent, 1978). All references to the 1587 edition from this edition.



column is from a version ten years later. Holinshed 1577 refers to "the French historie," and recounts none of her specific exploits; Holinshed 1587 refers to the French "bookes." Hall in addition cites many French sources.<sup>25</sup> Examining the contemporary source we have is thus useful in determining the kind and attitude of text Shakespeare's sources were dealing with.

The only contemporary account that we have of Joan of Arc is Christine de Pisan's Ditié. Both intelligent and gifted, Christine wrote prolifically and well for over thirty years, supporting herself and her three young children by her efforts and gaining the respect and admiration of both England and France's aristocracy and intellectual leaders. She is known to have turned down Henry V's offer of a place at his court. Cupid's Letter was translated into English by Hoccleve at the very beginning of the fifteenth century; and the "early popularity of Othéa's Letter to Hector in England led to its being translated and published in England three times during the fifteenth century alone."<sup>26</sup> Caxton himself published her Moral Proverbs in 1478, and they were reprinted by another publisher in 1526.<sup>27</sup> The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes was published in 1521,<sup>28</sup> as was The Book of the Body Politic.<sup>29</sup> Caxton himself, at the request of Henry VII, translated and published The Feat of Arms and Chivalry in 1489,<sup>30</sup> and, as Charity Cannon Willard notes, both it and The Book of the Body Politic "were translated, printed, and read in both France and England during the next [the sixteenth] century."<sup>31</sup> The Ditié as far as we know was not translated

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<sup>25</sup> Edward Halle, The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York, 1550. Menston: Scolar P, 1970 passim.

<sup>26</sup> Charity Cannon Willard, Christine de Pizan (New York: Persea, 1984) 165.

<sup>27</sup> Willard 174, 215.

<sup>28</sup> Woodbridge 16.

<sup>29</sup> Willard 193.

<sup>30</sup> Willard 215.

<sup>31</sup> Willard 193.

into English during the Renaissance, but its language and some of its imagery last throughout the tale(s) of Jeanne d'Arc.

Every one of the portrayals of the Maid is political. The politics vary from nationalist sentiment to self-aggrandizement and self-justification, and include gender politics. The list of works just cited signifies Christine de Pisan did not shrink from politics. Christine was both a respected French nationalist and an eloquent defender of her sex in the querelle de la Rose, which developed and continued at least into the seventeenth century as the querelle des femmes (manifest in the genre of the exempla). As later chroniclers become pro-English or anti-French, Kennedy and Varty explain what they term her "militant anti-Englishness," and which comes across as a exultant, almost transcendent song against those who forced Christine and others into exile when Paris fell . They state, "What is particularly indicative of her fierce sense of national identity is the concrete, violent, abusive nature of the language used in reference to the English."<sup>32</sup> But Christine's language, set as it is against the heightened poetry she uses for her own country and for Joan, is also inextricably bound with her unshakable and religious conviction that God is on the side of the French in this battle. This is a conviction that Edward Hall, in his anti-Frenchness and particularly anti-Joan stance, lacks. Hall's conviction is in the propriety and *mores* of his own patriarchal society, as we shall see.

Christine sees Joan in several different ways: daughter of France and of God; holy liberator; great female representative. All of these aspects are tied into one, and to attempt to segregate them is to lose the beautiful, integral picture of the whole which Christine presents. In effect, the Ditié is a contemporary account of a living legend. Briefly examining the central three huitains of the poem shows the careful integration which Christine crafts into her work:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Kennedy and Varty 13.

<sup>33</sup>The following huitains are central both because they occur in the exact middle of the poem, and because they comprise the heart of the poem as well.



(XXIX) Par miracle fut envoyée  
 Et divine amonition,  
 De l'ange de Dieu convoiée  
 Au roy, pour sa provision.  
 Son fait n'est pas illusion,  
 Car bien a esté esprouvée  
 Par conseil (en conclusion,  
 A l'effect la chose est prouvée),

(XXX) Et bien esté examinée  
 A, ains que l'on ait voulu croire,  
 Devant clers et sages menée  
 Pour enchercher se chose voire  
 Disoit, ainçois qu'il fust notoire  
 Que Dieu l'eust vers le roy tramise.  
 Mais on a trouvée en histoire  
 Qu'à ce faire elle estoit commise;

(XXXI) Car Merlin et Sebile et Bede,  
 Plus de V<sup>c</sup> ans a la virent  
 En esperit, et pour remede  
 En France en leurs escripz la mirent,  
 Et leur[s] prophecies en firent,  
 Disans qu'el pourteroit baniere  
 Es guerres françoises, et dirent  
 De son fait toute la maniere.<sup>34</sup>

Herein Christine combines not only Joan's religious and divinely inspired background, but also the fact that she was interrogated at Poitiers (during March and April of 1429) and justified by earthly powers as well. Then Christine proceeds to confront Joan's historicity, citing three of the most popularly accepted prophets, none of whom are French, and therefore who cannot be claimed to be biased. In this she shows an awareness, or expectation, that her work will be read beyond the boundaries of her country. Merlin may be a pagan prophet, but he is close to the hearts of the British; the Venerable Bede is incontrovertibly both devoutly Christian and English; and the Sibyl reappears in the *exempla* and in *1 Henry 6* as a comparison to Joan. It is to the Poitiers episode that Hall refers when he opines that Joan rehearsed to the French "visions, traunses, and fables, full of blasphemy, supersticion and hypocrisy, that I

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<sup>34</sup>*Ditié* 225-48.

marvell much that wise men did beleue her, and lerned clarkes would write suche phantasies." <sup>35</sup> Hall uses the same phrases as Christine--clerks and wise men.

Christine knows that one of the attacks on her Jehanne is that she is a woman.

Huitain XXXIV makes this perfectly clear:

Hee! quel honneur au femenin  
 Sexe! Que Dieu l'ayme il appert,  
 Quant tout ce grand pueple chenin,  
 Par qui tout le regne ert desert,  
 Par femme est sours et recouvert  
 Ce que C<sup>m</sup> hommes [fait] n'eussent  
 Et les traictres mis à desert!  
 A peine devant ne le creussent.<sup>36</sup>

Her sex is what most worries Hall, concerns Holinshed, and, in the end, effects all of the men, even the Frenchmen in Shakespeare's 1 Henry 6. Everything depends upon sex, and the sexual confusion into which Joan, or indeed any virago, throws the men who surround her. If, as Dusinger states, "In Shakespeare's plays men are conscious of being effeminised if their only weapons are words, historically the weapons of powerless women,"<sup>37</sup> then in 1 Henry 6, where even words are powerless to stop the power of La Pucelle, men find themselves worse off than women. They may escape the Countesses, but will find themselves entrapped by Margaret of Anjou (though, nominally at least, as the last lines of 1 Henry 6 state, Suffolk will rule Margaret).

However, despite the sexual tension in both fictional and historical accounts, those who tried Joan before her execution were unable to prove any accusation of lewdness. She was acknowledged a virgin. Nor could they prove her a witch--contrary to popular belief, she was burned as a heretic, not a witch. Her signed

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<sup>35</sup>1H6 145.

<sup>36</sup>Ditié 265-72.

<sup>37</sup>Dusinger xxvii. This statement is borne out in 1H6 in V.iv.105, in which York refers to peace as "effeminate."



confession states only that, "je confesse que j'ai gravement péché."<sup>38</sup> Numerous people interviewed at Joan's rehabilitation conceded this point, adding that if they possibly could have used those charges, they would have done. Clever words and double entendres, such as Joan herself never used (and does not use, even in the texts here), were used to entrap her into the heretical charge: her "last confessor" testified in 1450 that, "They put questions to her which were too difficult in order to catch her out by her own words and opinions. For she was a poor, rather simple woman who scarcely knew her Pater Noster and Ave Maria."<sup>39</sup>

Both the trial and the rehabilitation, and the tracts and records they produced, were strictly political efforts. Régine Pernoud observes that Cauchon (as the main prosecutor), "s'agit avant tout de prouver que le roi de France a été couronné par les artifices d'une sorcière - en tous cas d'une hérétique."<sup>40</sup> Joan is not the issue here. Charles VII is. For the same reason, Charles could not let Joan rest under suspicion, for if he did, his right as King remained under the same suspicion. Hence the rehabilitation. And just after the rehabilitation (ca. 1456), Matthieu Thomassin in his Registre Delphinal praised not only Joan, but Christine as her champion, clearly linking the two in defense not only of France, but of the female sex:

Mais sur tous les signes d'amour que Dieu a envoyez au Royaulme il n'y a point eu de si grand ne de si merueilleux comme de ceste pucelle. Et pour ce grandes croniques en sont faictes. Et entre les autres une notable femme appelée Christine qui a facit plusieurs livres en françoys . . . fist de l'advenement de ladite pucelle et de ses gestes ung traictié dont je mectray cy seulement le plus special touchant ladite pucelle.<sup>41</sup>

There is a parallel. As Joan tosses off the garb of a woman and clothes herself in the robes and actions of a man, so Christine labours in realms which the men of her time

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<sup>38</sup>Pernoud 104.

<sup>39</sup>Charles T. Wood, Joan of Arc & Richard III (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice, 1996) 151.

<sup>40</sup>Pernoud 101.

<sup>41</sup>Kennedy and Varty 5.

usually claimed as their own--most notably, financing and supporting her family by means of her own effort. Enid MacLeod relates how when Christine lay in severe duress, "she rose to the occasion, describing . . . how, while she lay wishing for death, Fortune came and turned her into a man."<sup>42</sup>

Hall's account, published in 1548, reveals a class bias in addition to a gendered agendum. He calls Joan "This wytch or manly woman, called the maide of GOD)," demonstrating that for him a witch is identical to a virago, an unruly woman, and continues,

[T]he Frenchmen greatly glorified and extolled [her]. . . O Lorde, what dispraise is this to the nobilitie of Fraunce? What blotte is this to the Frenche nacion? What more rebuke can be imputed to a renowned region then to affirme, write & confesse, that all notable victories, and honorable conquestes, which neither the kyng<sup>43</sup> with his power, nor the nobilitie with their valiauntnesse, nor the counsaill with their wit [this ostensibly the same wise men and clarkes Hall ridicules above], nor the commonaltie with their strenght [sic], could compasse or obtain, were gotten and achiued by a shepherdes daughter, a chamberlein in a hostrie, and a beggars brat. . .<sup>44</sup>

He attacks French nationalism because the French put their trust and success in a mere peasant. But what is worse than Joan's baseness, exclaims Hall, and what he puts forward as her ultimate and most telling crime, is Joan's stepping outside the boundaries of her sex:

[W]here was her shamefastnes, when she daily and nightly, was conuersant with comen souldiors, and men of warre[?] . . . Where was her womanly pitie, when she takyng to her the hearte of a cruell beaste slewe, man, woman, and childe, where she might haue the vpper hand? Where was her womanly behauor, when she cladde her self in a mannes clothyng, and was conuersaunt with euery losell, geuyng occasion to all men to judge, and speake euill of her, and her doynge.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Enid MacLeod, *The Order of the Rose* (London: C&W, 1976). 33.

<sup>43</sup>It is interesting that in his passion Hall slips and calls Charles the king here, rather than the Dolphin, as he does elsewhere.

<sup>44</sup>JH6 151-52.



The "hearte of a cruell beast" is also the heart of a soldier; killing when one has the upper hand in a combat situation is realistic and expected of men, though it may not be epically honourable.<sup>46</sup> Clearly Hall feels himself threatened by Joan. Indeed, Hall feels threatened only by Joan. Joan is the only French patriot to earn bad press in Hall's account; he even refers to Reignier as "this coragious Bastard."<sup>47</sup>

There is evidence that this English view of Joan crossed the Channel and was persuasive. Pernoud observes that De L'estat et mercy des affaires de France (1570) alleges that Joan was the mistress of at least one man, and therefore not a virgin. The response in 1580 was violent--those authors of De L'estat, "pour être pires que l'Anglais, font le procès extraordinaire à la renommée de celle à qui toute la France a tant d'obligation."<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the Ditié, the fact that Joan is female is cause for exultation as well as patriotic obligation. Christine starts off relatively tamely, claiming that Joan, because of God's will (and she is always very careful to underline this aspect) is more valiant than any Roman hero:

Car, se Dieu fist par Josué  
Des miracles à si grant somme,  
Conquerant lieux, et jus rué  
Y furent maint, il estoit homme  
Fort et puissant. Mais, toute somme,  
Une femme--simple bergiere--  
Plus preux qu'onc homs ne fut à Romme!  
Quant à Dieu, c'est chose legiere.<sup>49</sup>

It is exactly this aspect which Christine thinks incontrovertible, that Joan is a gift from God, which Hall allegedly attacks in passages such as

<sup>45</sup>1H6 152-53.

<sup>46</sup>In fact, the rest of the tetralogy bears this out--witness Rutland's death in 2H6, or York's or Edward's in 3H6 as examples.

<sup>47</sup>1H6 142.

<sup>48</sup>Pernoud 121. "L'Anglais"--the Englishman--is in the singular. I have not been able to trace it, but the possibility exists that it is to Hall to whom the 1580 retort is referring.

<sup>49</sup>Ditié 193-200.

What should I speake, how she had by reuelacion a swerde, to her appoynted in the churche of sainte Katheryn. What should I write, how she declared such priuy messages from God, our lady [sic], and other saintes, to the dolphyn, that she made the teres ronne doune from his iyes. So was he deluded, so was he blynded, & so was he deceiued by the deuils meanes which suffred her to begynne her race, and inconclusion [sic] rewarded her with a shameful fal.<sup>50</sup>

But even Hall must accord that "in the meane season suche credite was geuen to her, that she was honoured as a saint."<sup>51</sup> He cunningly leaves out the Rehabilitation.

And in the end, even Hall does not truly answer in the affirmative to the question Christine poses in her forty-seventh huitain:

N'appercevez-vous, gent aveugle  
 Que Dieu a icy la main mise?  
 Et qui ne le voit est bien bugle,  
 Car comment seroit en tel guise  
 Ceste Pucelle ça tramise  
 Qui tous mors vous fait jus abatre?  
 –Ne force [n']avez qui souffise!  
 Voulez-vous contre Dieu combatre?<sup>52</sup>

What Hall attempts to do is relocate God on the side of the English, so that the French versions of her are delusions. His emphasis lies on the shame that Joan should have felt, that France should have felt at following her and (it is implied) that his readers should feel when reading about her. He also relocates her miracles and uniqueness to mere unruliness, as his first introduction of Joan demonstrates:

there cam to hym [Charles] beyng at Chynon, a mayd of the age of xx. yeres, and in mans apparel, named Ione, borne in Burgoyne in a toune called Droymy beside Vancolour, which was a greate space a chamberleyn in a commen hostrey, and was a rampe of suche boldnesse, that she would course horses and ride them to water, and do thynges, that other yong maidens, bothe abhorred & wer ashamed to do: yet as some say, whether it wer because of her foule face, that no man would desire it, either she had made a vowe to liue chaste, she

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<sup>50</sup>1H6 146.

<sup>51</sup>1H6 146.

<sup>52</sup>Ditié 369-76.



kept her maydenhed, and preserued her virginitie. She (as a monster) was sent to the Dolphin. . . .<sup>53</sup>

"Monster" in this instance echoes what Hall calls Joan at the outset-- a "strange chaunce," a wondrous thing. One should keep in mind that "monster" has at its root, as the OED points out, the Latin verb for "to warn"; likewise, monsters are obstacles, sometimes wise ones, as Circe was for Odysseus.

Again, Jehanne's virginity was proven at the trial, though she herself testified that the English "had done me or had done to me in prison many wrongs and physical insults (lit. violences) when I was dressed as a woman,"<sup>54</sup> and therefore she re-assumed men's habits. As Marina Warner underlines, "Between Bedford's letter of 1429 and the final condemnation for heresy in 1431, all accusations of dissoluteness disappear. As Courcelles admitted at the rehabilitation, the evidence would have been used against her, if it existed."<sup>55</sup>

Holinshed grants her her purity; Hall grudgingly admits it, stating that if she had kept her virginity, it was probably because she was ugly. Hall's implication, carried out in later women such as Margaret of Anjou, is that a pretty woman is inherently lustful, dishonest, and dangerous. Holinshed allows Joan beauty; and in light of the abuse she suffered, it is likely she was not ill-favoured. Ugly women are not as dangerous, unless they are old, in which case they, too, stand to be accused of lewdness and witchcraft.

Hall's tone changes when he is not discussing Joan. The rest of the *racontage* of the reign of Henry VI is bland in comparison; he even identifies or at least sympathises with the French at the delivery of Orléans, stating "For they dyd, as we in like cace woulde haue doen, and we being in like estate, woulde haue doen as they did (Halle xxvi.x.3-5). Throughout the account of this time he only ever

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<sup>53</sup>1H6 145.

<sup>54</sup>Pernoud 105, my translation.

<sup>55</sup>Marina Warner, Joan of Arc (New York: Knopf, 1981) 105.

apostrophises Joan. In a letter to Charles Hall's text reads that the Dauphin has been "onelye allured and intised by a deuilische wytche, and a sathanicall enchaunteresse. . ." (Halle xxvii.v.2-4).

All this emphasises that Hall is motivated not by patriotic, anti-French fervour, but by antipathy to Joan. Shakespeare leaves out a letter from Henry VI to Burgundy, in which Joan's brothers are mentioned. Shakespeare's Joan is isolated except for an ineffective father, bowing to no male influence and no filial or sisterly duty. When she renounces her father she renounces all societal control, thus making her more threatening; brothers would have gotten in the way of this. Shakespeare also cannot include the posthumous debate on Joan's sanctity that Hall engages in.<sup>56</sup> However, Shakespeare can reflect the dual viewpoint on her in his play.

The two versions of Holinshed also demonstrate a difference in representation. The difference in editorial voice as shown in Appendix A is very clear. 1577, overseen by Holinshed himself, remains much more impartial, even though one phrase is taken straight from Hall. Nothing is said of Joan's transvestitism, though in typical English wise her sorcery is taken for granted. The difference in tone may be attributed partially to increasing awareness or concern with witchcraft: George Gifford's first treatise, A Discourse on the Subtill Practises of Devilles was also published in 1587; A Rehearsal both straung and true had been recounted in 1579; the Warboys incident started just two years after the revised Holinshed.<sup>57</sup> From this time forward more and more witchcraft treatises and pamphlets are published. This supports a view that witchcraft was seen as an increasing threat, in this context, Holinshed's rhetoric moves to counter it.

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<sup>56</sup> At one point Hall even implies paying homage to Joan's statue is idolatry, and then digresses to a homily on what the "proper" woman should be (Halle xxxiii.ii.1-20).

<sup>57</sup> George Gifford, A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles: London, 1587 (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977); A Rehearsal both straung and true, of hainous and horrible acts committed by Elizabeth Stile, alias Rockingham, Mother Durren, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, Fower notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore [sic] in the countie of Barks, and at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed, on the 26 daye of Februarie laste Anno 1579 (London).



Annabel Patterson acknowledges some of the difficulties that enter into reading what amounts to an anthology, both of authors and sources. Holinshed's multi-vocality, claims Patterson, is due to the fact that Holinshed

initiated a procedure whereby "the reader was left to be his own historian," not because the historian had abrogated his interpretative task, but because he wished to register how extraordinarily complicated, even dangerous, life had become in post-Reformation England, when every change of regime initiated a change in the official religion, and hence in the meaning and value of acts and allegiances. What at one moment was loyalty, obedience, and piety could at the next be redefined as treason or heresy.<sup>58</sup>

This excerpt reflects the attitudes in which Joan is portrayed in 1 Henry 6. Each change in viewpoint, from French to English, shifts the meaning Joan holds for the speakers and the audience. Holinshed 1577 follows Patterson's observation, being more careful, more studied. 1587, however, unlike its predecessor, seems more secure in its political outlook, at least with regard to Joan and witchcraft. Thus the text picks up again its "interpretative task" and urges its readers to accept a particular viewpoint, confident it will not be "redefined as treason or heresy." Again, this supports the view that witchcraft was becoming an increasing concern, and one an author need not be afraid to speak out against.

Holinshed 1587 dwells on all Joan's transgressions, and undercuts her at every turn. "Semblance" implies deceit; the parenthetical reference to the French books sets up an us/them division and discounts "their" story. Whereas 1577 has no especial emphasis on the trial, 1587 entitles the trial section *The Confession of Joan*, and reads more like a broadside than a chronicle. And the 1587 version reflects the threat posed by the virago or "wytch or manly woman," as Hall interchangeably and tellingly phrases it, and places Joan's lack of "womanliness" ahead of any devilment in his description of her transgression: "Wherein found though a virgin, yet first, shamefullie rejecting hir sex abominable in acts and apparell, to have counterfeit

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<sup>58</sup>Annabel Patterson, Reading Holinshed's Chronicles (London: U of Chicago P, 1994) 6.

mankind, and then, all damnablie faithlesse, to be a pernicious instrument to hostilitie and bloudshed in divilish witchcraft and sorcerie. . ."59

The 1587 version was, as Patterson observes, highly censored, and therefore this damning portrayal of Joan passed the censors. This cannot be merely anti-French feeling or reactions against the Alençon/Elizabeth I phenomenon, for if so it would transmit itself to portrayals of both sexes, instead of the virulence that attaches itself solely to Joan. This shift between the two versions comes closest to matching the shift in Shakespeare's play of the early 1590s.

This dichotomous viewpoint has several explanations, which are rooted in intellectual, political, and sexual beginnings. In addition to the multi-vocality which Holinshed espouses, especially in the 1577 edition, Jackson notes,

Joan appears amidst a tangle of contradictory allusions: she is among other identifications a Sibyl, an Amazon, a Deborah, Helen the mother of Constantine, and Astraea's daughter to the French, but Hecate and Circe to the English. Of the women alluded to in 1 Henry VI, eleven appear as exempla in the formal controversy. The genre itself was tolerant of, not to say dependent upon, divergent evaluations of the same phenomenon: a number of its exempla, like Helen of Troy, appeared regularly on both sides, and some writers handily produced treatises both pro and con. It would come as no surprise to readers of the controversy that one man's Sibyl is another man's Hecate.<sup>60</sup>

One of the mechanisms by which the English chronicles damn Joan is her lack of mystery. No aloofness separates her from her suppliants, as with a Sibyl or with Lyly's Mother Bombie; she does not hide herself in darkness and shrouding mists in alternative, liminal locations, like the goddess Hecate, the Weïrd Sisters in Macbeth, for example, or Middleton's Heccat. The fact that Joan shows herself openly at all times, whether conversing with kings or common soldiers is held by the English faction(s) to be damning, though Christine considers the fact that Joan acts "mains yeulx voiant"<sup>61</sup> to place her above suspicion of lies or tricks. Christine believes in

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<sup>59</sup>1H6 167. Emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup>Jackson 48.



Joan as a shining light; Hall and Holinshed 1587 see in her a deadly fascination. Jackson observes "The need to neutralize the virago, however, even the admired virago, is as pervasive in the period's writing as the evident fascination with her--indeed it is probably a tribute to the force that fascination exerted."<sup>62</sup>

To neutralise Joan, admitted by both Hall and Holinshed to be a virgin, she must be made a harlot, a wanton, a strumpet, a trull, and a witch. Whores can be consigned to Hell's fires with a clean conscience, if they are determinedly unrepentant. Unruly women, rendered fascinating by their eloquence (as Joan shows in her conversion of Burgundy) and wit (evidenced in her sallies with the English), can be conquered if they and their speech are discounted, made unbelievable. Women, if they leave off being womanly, must be whores. Orgel explains, "The idea that being a harlot constitutes masculine behaviour is no doubt paradoxical, but it shows precisely how much anxieties about women's sexuality, in this or any other period, are a projection of male sexual fantasies--being masculine meaning, in this context, being able to have constant and promiscuous sex."<sup>63</sup> This citation is more easily understood in light of the link between speech and sexual prowess or propensity. Loose speech represents loose morals; loose morals belong to men (in whom such loose behaviour is not deemed immoral, but matter-of-fact).

From the beginning of 1 Henry 6, men's perceptions and misperceptions of Joan's sexuality fill the play. In I.iv, before Talbot meets Joan, and before he has assigned her any significance--or at least any more significance than he accords to Charles--he states in his grief "Puzzel or Pucelle, dolphin or dogfish, / Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels" (106-07). Cairncross notes the probable bawdy play on "puzzel," and states that "Pucelle" in and of itself may signify "harlot." The OED lists "puzel," "puzzel," and "puzzle" and variants of "pucelle." The primary definition

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<sup>61</sup>Ditié 280.

<sup>62</sup>Jackson 59.

<sup>63</sup>Orgel 18. Note that in the OED, harlot is predominantly a masculine appellation; not until the fifth definition is it applied to women.

of "pucelle" is a girl or maid, with a sub-definition meaning Joan herself. Both of these meanings, and the word itself, enter English around 1430. The secondary meaning, which Cairncross notes--that of a drab or courtesan--does not accrue to the word until 1520 at the earliest, and therefore may specifically reflect English attitudes to Joan. There may also be at this line, as Cairncross suggests, a play on "pizzle," in which case sexual identity and potency are again at risk, for pizzle refers to the penis of an animal, most particularly that of a bull. There may also be a pun on the primary meaning of "puzzle," as Joan is a puzzle not easily solved. There must be some form of opposition set up in this phrase, for the chiasmatic construction of the appositives links "puzzel" with "dogfish," words which are clearly pejorative, and "Pucelle" with "dolphin," on the opposite end of the appositive spectrum.<sup>64</sup>

In French, though the word has more than one sense, the meaning is positive. Christine uses "Pucelle" for Joan several times, which she would not if the term were at all pejorative. Warner glosses it thus:

"Pucelle" means "virgin," but in a special way, with distinct shades connoting youth, innocence and, paradoxically, nubility...It denotes a time of passage, not a permanent condition. It is a word that looks forward to a change in state. In Old French, it was the most common word for a young girl; in Middle French, damoiselle began taking over. By Joan's day vierge was also sometimes added to pucelle to clarify the meaning of chastity; this shows the underlying ambiguity of the word...The inference of virginity became firmer through the Middle Ages, especially after despulceler, meaning "to deflower," was introduced in the twelfth century.<sup>65</sup>

The word therefore places Joan on thresholds, renders her liminal and, at the same time, transcendent:

With an instinct for seizing a central image of power, which Joan possessed to an extraordinarily developed degree, she picked a word for virginity that captured with doubled strength the magic of her state in her culture. It expressed not only the incorruption of her body, but

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<sup>64</sup>See 1H6 30 for Cairncross' interpretation.

<sup>65</sup>Warner 22-23.



also the dangerous border into maturity or full womanhood that she had not crossed and would not cross.<sup>66</sup>

Christine would have been aware of these meanings; she also calls Joan "fillette," probably both an endearment and a recognition of the fact that, although feminine, she was not a mature woman. Endearment in this case does not imply reduction of status--rather, it plays upon both the youth and innocence Warner mentions.

However one chooses to gloss Talbot's phrase, I.v more clearly establishes Talbot's sexual anxiety. Line 1 reveals that Talbot considers himself emasculated. "Where is my strength, my valour, and my force?" he cries. As Marcus notes, witches, "were sexually ambiguous creatures who, according to widespread contemporary belief, often used their occult powers to prey upon male strength and sexual potency."<sup>67</sup> Talbot has lost battles before, and will do again, but never before has he been defeated by a female. His subsequent lewd words and bawdy accusations result from his insecurity. Line 4, "I'll have a bout with thee," has sexual connotations; "punishing" a strumpet, in addition to moral connotations, carries with it titillation and a desire to dominate.<sup>68</sup> He desires to overcome, but finds himself impotent. It is worth pointing out that Talbot dies before he regains his power.

In II.i, Charles, too, finds himself in Joan's thrall. Again, it is the fact that she vanquishes him physically which makes her desirable. Orgel notes, "If masculine attire on women had been found generally repellent, it would not have been stylish, and we must conclude that there were Renaissance men who (not unlike many modern men) liked finding themselves in the women they admired."<sup>69</sup> If so, these very feelings in the men in the play, or in the chroniclers, threaten their self-

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<sup>66</sup>Warner 23.

<sup>67</sup>Marcus 81.

<sup>68</sup>The historical Joan apparently had the same effect, for Warner observes that "Joan's intransigent conviction of her personal truth destroyed her enemies' equilibrium. The insults, the torments, above all the attempted violations are acts of defiance, not confidence" (106).

<sup>69</sup>Orgel 16.

definition, and the definitions of sexual attraction society has meted out for them. In addition, it holds the possibility that they are attracted to the virago because they themselves are effeminate or effeminised. The violence of reaction harks back to Guyon's excess in the Bower of Bliss.<sup>70</sup> Since they cannot allow themselves to find the "flaw" in themselves, they project it onto the woman who has brought the issue into question.

This study not only refutes Linda Bamber's claim that women in Shakespeare's history plays are "unproblematic,"<sup>71</sup> but also that, in them, "the feminine Other does not call the masculine Self into question."<sup>72</sup> Her view that "the feminine in Shakespeare may or may not be associated with nature, but it is always something unlike and external to the Self, who is male . . . the feminine here is that which exists on the other side of a barrier, the barrier of sexual differentiation,"<sup>73</sup> holds true, especially concerning occult witches, but should be extended to the history plays. Joan serves as Other for Talbot's Self, and for York's; Margaret then becomes York's Other, as their final confrontation shows. York's only triumph is to have a son living when Margaret doesn't, and the lengths to which he goes to best her and the degree to which he feels the conflict demonstrate how central an issue it is. Bamber also believes, "Only as the Other are women in Shakespeare consistently the equals of men. Only in opposition to the hero and the world of men, only as representatives of alternative experience do the women characters matter to Shakespeare's drama as much as the men."<sup>74</sup> This brings into focus the question of voice with regard to Shakespearean theatre. Only a manly voice can be heard and thus, unless a man's

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<sup>70</sup>See chapter 1.

<sup>71</sup>Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1982) 21.

<sup>72</sup>Bamber 22.

<sup>73</sup>Bamber 4.

<sup>74</sup>Bamber 141. This study demonstrates in chapter 6 that Lady Macbeth in Macbeth is a significant exception to this formula.



voice calls for a change in action or status, no change will be made. As 1 Henry 6 is an English argument for English supremacy, it does not necessarily see the need for change, and takes over the image-making process that depicts Joan. The play concerns itself solely with a male Self; this implies a female audience will be either left out or forced to identify with the male voice in power.

Rackin contrasts tragedy and history as well, but defines them in terms of their audience. She affirms, "Despite the many similarities between the subjects of the two genres, contemporary descriptions of the ways they affected their audiences are strikingly different in regard to issues of gender. Antitheatrical invectives typically attacked all theatrical performance as effeminating, but the English history play offered a significant exception."<sup>75</sup> This bears out the theory above. History is constituted as male, which probably contributes to the difference in gender. "Because history sought to commemorate the past, reconstituted as a nostalgically idealized world of the fathers, women and sexuality occupied only marginal roles."<sup>76</sup> In his first tetralogy, however, Shakespeare de-marginalises both women and sexuality. Women become both central and centrally threatening, "potent threats to the masculine project of English history-making."<sup>77</sup>

Alençon and Reignier, possibly because they are French and therefore not threatened by Joan's victories, do not see themselves as threatened. Their bawdy banter in I.ii, whilst it demonstrates the way in which the attraction of the virago is portrayed, also serves to establish the characters of the two Frenchmen as wits, playing with doubles entendres much more subtly than Talbot ever does. Here is one hint that Shakespeare's sympathies may lie more with the French than has been formerly suspected.

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<sup>75</sup>Rackin 48.

<sup>76</sup>Rackin 50.

<sup>77</sup>Rackin 51.

Joan in I.ii successfully defends her purity and idealism. However, the fragility of that position manifests itself in II.i, when even Charles, her sworn servant from I.ii, accuses her: "Is this thy cunning, thou deceitful dame?"<sup>78</sup> The term cunning, in addition to meaning clever craftiness, also in this context signifies simple magics. Interestingly, it is a term usually applied only to men, hence the popular term "cunning man."<sup>79</sup>

Joan, however, reacts with uncommon good sense and wry wit: "At all times will you have my power alike? / Sleeping or waking, must I still prevail?" (55-56). Were she a witch, then perhaps she could have her eyes open while she sleeps, but she cannot. It is much more sensible, as Joan points out, to assume that somewhere the watch was lax. In light of the celebrations which undoubtedly followed the taking of Orléans, and which are alluded to in most sources and in II.i.11-12, this is not unlikely. The men then engage in blame-shifting exercises, in which Joan refuses to join and which she stops by sensibly suggesting that they retreat to recoup their position and devise new successes, which indeed they do. After this time, no Frenchman presumes to bawd Joan, and Charles redeems his use of the word "cunning" in III.iii, where he uses it only in its sense of craftiness.

The English persist in denigrating Joan. In the play, there are forty epithets applied to Joan, not counting comparisons and allusions (as to the Sibyls, Hannibal, the sword of Deborah), more almost than are applied to all women in the rest of the tetralogy. This fact underlines the importance Joan holds in the tetralogy, and the intensity which she inspires. Of these, twenty-four are used by the English: four are ambiguous or decidedly ironic, one, though negative, is reported by Joan herself, and two are positive. The positive ones, "holy prophetess" and "virtuous Joan of Aire," are spoken by an English messenger and Talbot, respectively.<sup>80</sup> The messenger's

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<sup>78</sup>1H6 II.i.50.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) *passim*. Lyly contravenes this in *Mother Bombie*, as does Heywood in *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon*.



reference is Joan's first introduction to the English. The second deserves to be cited in full, as it could be read to mean that despite his dislike, Talbot does not doubt Joan's veracity or power; she at least is not false: "His [the Dauphin's] new-come champion, virtuous Joan of Aire / Nor any of his false confederates."<sup>81</sup>

Joan is never actually called "harlot." Barring "fiend," which appears twice and is paired with "courtezan" and "hag," all negative epithets are specifically female and attempt to bring her back within the realm of her sex.<sup>82</sup> When these attempts fail, she becomes the "foul accursed minister of hell" York condemns her as, and whose condemnation, as the last reference to Joan in the play, opposes the original "holy prophetess" of the first English mention, and the "holy maid" of the first French mention.<sup>83</sup>

The French use sixteen epithets, only two of which are negative, in neat balance to the two positive English ones. The first, "deceitful dame," has been discussed. The second is the last time the French address her, and is spoken by her father: "cursed drab."<sup>84</sup> She has become the puzzel Talbot spoke of, and the English viewpoint triumphs.

However, Joan is accused of being a drab in the English presence, just as the English are the ones who accuse her of witchcraft. Joan is driven to wry retaliation only once, in III.ii, when Talbot simultaneously accuses her of being both hag and damsel, and offers again to "have a bout" with her. She dryly wonders at his alleged "hotness" and prowess, but recalls herself. With infinite amusement she bests Talbot: when the English confer, she calls out "God speed the parliament! Who shall be the

<sup>80</sup>I.iv.101, and II.ii.20-21.

<sup>81</sup>This reading is supported by Warner's observation: "Joan was either unruly or heretical; either a rebel to the promptings of her conscience or...the tool of figments of an evil mind or of fiends themselves. This kind of double-think is rife in the charges; and it is endemic to the business of witch-hunting, for the very reason that the witch-hunter is the alleged witch's most committed believer" (114).

<sup>82</sup>III.iii.45, V.iii.42.

<sup>83</sup>V.iv.92, I.ii.51.

<sup>84</sup>V.iv.32.

Speaker?" and to Talbot's unlikely challenge, she responds "Belike your lordship takes us then for fools, / To try that if our own be ours or no." Talbot, realising he is bested (and effeminised, as Dusinger would note), refuses to talk to Joan at all, and the fact that he is not taking his dismissal well is shown by Joan's gibe at his glowering looks.

Act V brings confusion to Joan's portrayal. Where once she called on the blessed saints, now she calls upon "fiends"; where once her speech was chaste and pure, now she offers herself, body and soul, part and parcel, to suckle demons. Early in the play, Joan pointedly admits herself a simple shepherdess; in V.iv she curses and denies her father, without any development in her character which would warrant the change. Perhaps she does not want to give the English any reason to incarcerate or punish her father, but no indication of this is given in her lines. If it is not just an English invention, the lewdness and wantonness Joan allegedly displays in this scene is alone explainable: a pregnant woman cannot be executed. Shakespeare twists this "privilege" so that York and Warwick claim the babe is not innocent, and can be killed.

Perhaps, just at the end, starting in V.iii, Joan can be believed to fall prey to the devil just as she falls prey to the English. This is the scene in which Margaret is introduced, and as has been noted Joan must be disposed of so that her lineage, so to speak, may be continued in Margaret. In V.iii, for the first time in the play, Joan begins to curse. Cursing, as the Dog notes in Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton, is an invitation for the devil to enter. The Devil does not enter, but Suffolk and Margaret do.

Joan leaves off cursing for the most part in V.iv; when she does curse, after all her efforts at a stay of execution have failed, she is leaving the stage for the last time. Her rather grand death curse gives her more dignity than an exit pleading for her life would do; also, in response, York, too, begins cursing. The Devil does not enter, but Winchester does.<sup>85</sup>

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V.iii shows England martially triumphant; Joan notes at line 1, "The Regent conquers and the Frenchmen fly." This scene solidifies the English viewpoint. In the early acts, the English and French opinions, like the armies, are kept separate; if they appear in the same scene, at least a city wall separates them. In III.ii, French opinion vies with the English at Rouen. The English win; the French are routed. Though Joan recoups her image a bit with the military seduction of Burgundy, there is a steady slide towards denigration. V.iii, despite being introduced by Joan, becomes essentially an English scene; for this reason, the English view of Joan is the one portrayed. They see her as sorceress and harlot; V.iii proves the one, V.iv the other.<sup>86</sup> It is an English play. Its "truths" are subjective and English.

However, even for an English audience, Shakespeare introduces enough ambiguity for the discerning audience to redeem Joan. Even in V.iii he undercuts his damnation of Joan by setting up York as a villain (discussed below). Other ambiguity comes even at the expense of the English, and particularly at the expense of Talbot. As has been stated above, the French are portrayed as wits; Talbot never manages to best Joan; when Joan could be said to fall prey to dark temptations, it is only because she has fallen prey to the English, physically and imagistically. This ambiguity warrants a closer look at the text, and, more specifically, Shakespeare's development and use of the subject of witchcraft and, by extension, *La Pucelle*.

Shakespeare introduces both witchcraft and astrology in I.i. When Exeter is looking for someone or something on whom to pin his blame and grief at the death of Henry V, he cries

What! shall we curse the planets of mishap  
That plotted thus our glory's overthrow?  
Or shall we think the subtle-witted French  
Conjurers and sorcerors, that, afraid of him,

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<sup>85</sup>Cursing plays an interesting role throughout the tetralogy. See Appendix B, "Cursing (in) Shakespeare's First Tetralogy."

<sup>86</sup> There is also the possibility that this scene gratifies a desire for spectacle, as the witch scenes in *Macbeth* and *The Witch* could be said to do. Unfortunately, space prohibits a full study of this aspect and of the role of spectacle in late Tudor and early Stuart texts.

By magic verses have contriv'd his end?<sup>87</sup>

This speech remains, however, just what it purports to be—a search for a scapegoat. There is no sense that Exeter believes in maleficium. Gloucester, however, notes that the atmosphere is ripe for witchcraft to prosper, because religion is absent:

The Church! Where is it? Had not churchmen pray'd,  
His thread of life had not so soon decayed.  
None do you like but an effeminate prince,  
Whom like a school-boy you may overawe.<sup>88</sup> (33-36).

From the very beginning, therefore, and before Joan is even introduced, inversion and cross-dressing run rampant in England. Winchester, ostensibly the man of God, surrounds himself with secular possessions and glories, and has fallen prey to profane ambitions. The Prince, who should be manly, is effeminised. Suffolk, though he does not appear in I.i, will also cross the boundaries of lawful marriage into the territory of adulterous love or lust.

This then is the atmosphere against which Joan's and France's entry into the play is set. Joan comes on stage, sees through Reignier's ruse, bests the Dolphin in single combat, and is promptly compared to Amazons and Deborah, both positive exempla. She also took her holy sword from where it was stuck in a lump of iron in a churchyard. Joan provides the notion of what a man should be. And yet she is a maid, and chaste. She utters what is, in the play, a curious quatrain:

I must not yield to any rites of love,  
For my profession's sacred from above:  
When I have chased all thy foes from hence,  
Then will I think upon a recompense.<sup>89</sup>

Although there are rhyming couplets scattered throughout the play, there are only three scenes in which any character has an entirely rhymed speech; each time, the speaker is expressing the highest and noblest of sentiments. Joan recounts the first

<sup>87</sup>1H6 I.i.23-27.

<sup>88</sup>1H6 I.i.33-36.

<sup>89</sup>1H6 I.ii.113-16.



instance; Talbot and his son, in IV.vi, and Talbot in IV.vii. Talbot, before he dies, manages to regain some of the nobility which he loses during the play.

For Talbot starts the play in captivity, and ends the play dead. In the mean time, he is bested by Joan, physically and verbally. He manages to reverse some of her victories, but she finishes their relationship with the upper hand and, in IV.vii, where, in further proof of her nobility, she eulogizes (in rhyme) John Talbot and grants Lucy permission to bear the Talbots' bodies back for burial. She retains her sense as well as her sensibility, however; in IV.vii.72-76 she cuts through the ridiculous rhetoric of Lucy's with a sharp rejoinder and reminder of mortality. When Lucy achieves some measure of eloquence, she compliments him, and, whilst commending the spirits which once inhabited the flesh, still notes that the flesh itself is corrupt, and it is far easier for the English to take care of their dead than for France to have to endure the stench. Joan consistently refuses to be cast or typed in any one vein; she cannot be predicted or categorized. As Jackson observes, "Uncommitted to convention, Joan is also uncommitted to the ethical stereotypes that structure the consciousness of other characters. This is her most threatening and most appealing function."<sup>90</sup>

A hero, the play implies, should not be a woman, and, if she must be a woman, she should at least have the grace to retort in rhetoric. In I.v, when Joan and Talbot meet for the first time, Talbot is both unmanned and unnerved. In defeat, Talbot claims that his weakness and ineptitude are not his own fault--a common accusation brought against witches is that they render men impotent. Talbot accuses her in a most curious and important quatrain at lines 4-7:

Here, here she comes. I'll have a bout with thee;  
Devil or devil's dam, I'll conjure thee:  
Blood will I draw on thee, thou art a witch,  
And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv'st.

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<sup>90</sup>Jackson 58.

The "thee / thee" rhyme, like the "them / them" couplet which precedes it, is awkward; Talbot has lost even his power of eloquence. He interjects lewdness into his speech in line 4. Cairncross explains that one who could draw a witch's blood was exempt from her power; however, two other observations are more compelling. Though scratching was a very popular belief, not all believed it was efficacious or even good. At one extreme, William Perkins believed it was sin, a breaking of a commandment.<sup>91</sup> Warner wraps all meanings into her explanation: the witch's blood was "the innermost symbol of her being, the seal of life, the matrix....Letting the blood of a witch flow could place her in your power, could break the spell of her wholeness."<sup>92</sup> This places familiars in an interesting light--it is the very fact that they draw blood which gives them power over a witch's soul. With this in mind, Talbot becomes a more interesting and curious figure, and draws himself into his own web of evil with his words. A familiar's main goals, as evidenced, for example, in The Witch of Edmonton, are to suckle the witch, draw her into evil, and deliver her soul to the devil. Talbot, in I.v, makes himself Joan's familiar.

Infuriatingly for Talbot, Joan does not rise to his bait. She remains solid and sensible, saying, practically, "Come, come, 'tis only I that must disgrace thee" (8). She is Joan, and no devil or any other force. Lest the audience miss this inference, Talbot further undermines his position (and his accusation of sorcery) in lines 21-22: "A witch by fear, not force, like Hannibal, / Drives back our troops and conquers as she lists. . . ." A curious statement, considering that he has just spent an entire scene being vanquished by force, not fear, and that Talbot's life has been spared (it is implied) only at God's command. The fear is his own. It is no wonder, then, that Talbot, in II.i, introduces the firm "belief" that all the French victory is "Contriv'd by art and baleful sorcery" (15). Bedford has accepted the story--Talbot is, after all, a

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<sup>91</sup> James Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996) 86. Scepticism, of course, also dictated that scratching was simply inefficacious, if not a sin.

<sup>92</sup> Warner 109.



hero. And, when Burgundy attempts to turn the conversation, Talbot dismisses the all with an abrupt "Well, let them practise and converse with spirits" (25). Diane Purkiss believes, "The conversion of the other from a foreign army into a witch represents an inside-outing of the threat of the other, from the masculine realm of war (in which Joan is a virago) to the feminine realm of sorcery."<sup>93</sup> Talbot's allegations and subsequent dismissal are a masculine attempt to cope with Joan by what he sees as belittling her--denying her "masculine" achievements and forcibly re-defining her in a feminine sphere. Talbot's reaction belies Constance Jordan's observation: "In herself, of course, the virile woman tended to reaffirm patriarchal values. Her excellence is seen in her masculinity--that is, her rationality, courage, and physical strength."<sup>94</sup> The French in the play could support this claim; however, Shakespeare undercuts it by allowing the English viewpoint to end the play.

A case could conceivably be made that Shakespeare in Joan prefigures the witches in Macbeth: in I.ii, Joan reveals that she had been foul, and now is fair. Likewise, it is just conceivable that when Alençon in III.iii says that Joan "doth deserve a crown of gold," Joan may start to get the ideas above her station which lead to the denial of her father. However, at base both these details have their roots in sources. Hall states Joan was foul; Holinshed that she was fair. Joan's transformation is an attempt to reconcile two disparate sources, each of which considers Joan's outward appearance paramount. If she is foul, her outer appearance depicts her inner, as discussed in chapter 1. Although we do not necessarily know exactly what French sources Holinshed used, Christine de Pisan states,

Donc desur tous les preux passez,  
Ceste doit porter la couronne,  
Car ses faiz ja monstrent assez  
Que plus prouesse Dieu la donne  
Qu'à tous ceulz de qui l'on raisonne.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London: Routledge, 1996) 190.

<sup>94</sup>Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 137.

Granted, almost certainly it is not the literal crown of France of which Christine speaks; it is far more likely to be the crown of achievement, and the crown of supreme virtue as well. But this huitain does demonstrate that Alençon's comment, too, probably only reflects sources.<sup>96</sup>

Even in V.iii, Shakespeare grants to Joan some small redemption. York refers to her as an "ugly witch," though no transformation is noted anywhere in the play, and then conflates Joan with Circe: "See how the ugly witch doth bend her brows, / As if, with Circe, she would change my shape!" Joan retorts, "Chang'd to a worser shape thou canst not be." Circe is a notoriously unruly woman, one to whom this study repeatedly turns. Gareth Roberts affirms, "Circean seduction was a form of rebellion. One of her dangers is the usurpation and consequently the subjugation of the male by the female. Perhaps one should remember that the primary meaning of 'seduce' is political rather than sexual: 'to persuade (a vassal, servant, etc.) to desert his allegiance or service.'<sup>97</sup> In a military history, the threat of a woman who can defeat or deflect a man's martial prowess inspires more horror than elsewhere. Joan is a more powerful figure than the Countess. Throughout the tetralogy, allegiances and vows are deserted and betrayed; hence seduction carries that connotation successfully as well. In addition, Circe, though a dangerous herbalist, was also prophet and guide to Odysseus; and in the Renaissance, the literary tradition exists whereby Circe merely acts as a catalyst whereby seemingly decent men turn themselves into the beasts which their inner natures truly proclaim them.<sup>98</sup> And, as has been observed, York degenerates; curses; "summons" Winchester; wishes for continued war;

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<sup>95</sup>Ditié 345-49.

<sup>96</sup>As the crown comment does not appear in Hall or Holinshed, it may be that Shakespeare had access to, if not the Ditié, perhaps a similar or derivative French account.

<sup>97</sup>Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe," Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 203.

<sup>98</sup>For a more detailed study of specific literary references, see Critical Imagery: the Role of the Pagan in the Caroline Masque, my M.A. thesis for UWB (1994). For a general overview of Renaissance Circean imagery, see Roberts 187-90.



acknowledges his own "boiling choler" which "chokes / The hollow passage of my poison'd voice"; and generally remains uncivil until the end of the play.<sup>99</sup>

"The virago," observes Orgel, "is a cautionary topos throughout the popular literature of the age, but she is also a comic figure. If she is considered threatening, the threat is also regularly distanced and disarmed. But admiration too forms a significant component of the Renaissance response to women who are perceived as masculine."<sup>100</sup> Admired by the French (and Shakespeare), La Pucelle in 1 Henry 6 threatens Englishmen, whose only response is exactly to distance and disarm her. The only conceivable way in which they can accomplish this is by declaring her a witch, an unruly woman, a heretic against patriarchy as much as, if not more than, God. Joan was tried in front of an ecclesiastical court because there were no laws against "manly women." If one can't burn a roaring girl, one can turn her into a witch. Witches' crimes are for the most part inherently linked to their sex, just as Joan's are in 1 Henry 6. And, just as Joan's masculinity makes her, perversely, a harlot, so too Orgel notes "witches, though epitomizing what was conceived as a specifically female propensity to wickedness, were also often accused of being either unfeminine or androgynous. . . . The specifically and dangerous female here, that is, expresses itself through inappropriate masculine attributes."<sup>101</sup>

The ambiguity of the virago, caught in literature, in the formal controversy, and in society, is reflected in Shakespeare's dramas. Joan is most dangerous as a woman because she is manly; she is an unpredictable hero where the predictable hero fails; and she in and of herself shows England what a proper ruler should be. At the end of 1 Henry 6, Charles has more dignity than he has had throughout the play, though he is forced to bend his knee to Henry, the "effeminate prince." Inversions and reversals are prevalent throughout 1 Henry 6, and not just in the figure of Joan.

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<sup>99</sup>V.iv.120-21 and passim.

<sup>100</sup>Orgel 13.

<sup>101</sup>Orgel 15.

Yet because of her portrayal, on the one hand fractured and unbelievable, and on the other earthy, real, and sympathetic, Joan cannot, as Jackson observes, be pinned to any one stereotype. She remains outside the realm of classification, and leaves uncertainty behind, both on the stage and in the minds of the audience. "This uncertainty," states Warner,

points to a reality at the centre of transvestitism for a woman: that it unsexes her and dehumanises her, but does not confer manhood upon her. She remains ambiguous. But in the process, she rises rather than falls. Yet her unsexed state requires the manners, customs, and, of course, the dress of the male....But as the rejection of femininity is associated with positive action, it assumes the garb of virtue, in the classical sense, virtus. Semantically, virtue is associated with man (vir).<sup>102</sup>

The irony in this statement is obvious: women are condemned for manly behaviour, but are held to an image of virtue which is inherently and semantically masculine and which, of course, is also defined by men. Unlike Britomart who, however uneasily, turns to marriage, Joan's horror for the male participant in the play, and for a male-gendered or male-identified audience, is that she neither seeks nor has imposed upon her any of the classic cures for unruliness. Indeed, she shuns men's advances and advice. Shakespeare's choice to portray Joan as a palimpsest of his sources, fluctuating and multi-valent, emphasises rather than reduces the tension in the play. The only resolution she can have in the play is death. Her death is at the hands of the English; her final scene, under English domination.

Joan is only dehumanised by English action in 1 Henry 6, when they turn her into a supernatural monstrosity. In and of herself, she is deeply and earthily real. But Warner's observation holds true of Shakespearean "witches" in general, even when their unruliness does not extend to transvestitism. Lady Macbeth calls to be unsexed; the Weird Sisters are ambiguous; Paulina is "a mankind witch." But more than these, Margaret of Anjou fits the description, as a woman who rises by her assumption of

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<sup>102</sup>Warner 147.



the manly behaviour and classical virtue that her husband cannot attain. She, too, is often discounted as a witch, though her status is not less ambiguous, if more subtle, than Joan's.

## CHAPTER 6. THESE TELL-TALE WOMEN--SURVIVING THE FIRST TETRALOGY

In the second and third parts of King Henry VI and King Richard III the cast of female characters is richer, and whereas Margaret of Anjou can be said to dominate 3 Henry 6, in 2 Henry 6 and Richard III she has companions of almost equal import, if not force, in the other queens and the Duchesses of Gloucester and York.<sup>1</sup> Margaret matures from adolescent queen to devoted mother and wife and finally ends up a hag-like crone, whose prophetic utterances, along with her earlier unwomanly behaviour, label her a witch. However, she is not alone. In 2 Henry 6, both Eleanor Cobham and Margery Jourdain are condemned as witches (and for their very real practices they have more reason to be condemned than ever Margaret does); and in Richard III each woman in turn, mostly by virtue of cursing and being cursed, joins Margaret in the category of crone. By virtue of their unabashed vocality, especially their cursing, which is unruly, powerful speech par excellence, they are witches; however, the extent to which they believe in their own verbal power determines how successful they are as crones, what power they have as characters in the play, and what impact they leave upon audience and readers.

Paula S. Berggren states that "the central element in Shakespeare's treatment of women is always their sex, not as a force for cultural obsevation or social criticism (though these may be discerned), but primarily as a mythic source of power, an archetypal symbol that arouses both love and loathing in the male."<sup>2</sup> Sex, sexuality, gender, and the development and inversions thereof are themes which invade,

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare, The First Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross, Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1962); The Second Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross, Arden ed. (1957; London: Methuen, 1969); The Third Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross, Arden ed. (1964; London: Methuen, 1965); King Richard III, ed. Antony Hammond, Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1981). Hereafter 1 Henry 6, 2 Henry 6, 3 Henry 6, and Richard III in text; 1H6, 2H6, 3H6, and R3 in notes. All references to source materials for the plays from these editions unless designated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup>Paula S. Berggren, "The Woman's Part: Female Sexuality as Power in Shakespeare's Plays," The Woman's Part, eds. Carolyn Lenz, Ruth Swift, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (London: U of Illinois P, 1980) 18.



pervade, and permeate the entire tetralogy. Though the inversion is not limited to women (Henry VI is, for example, ever a womanish man; Suffolk is called "coward woman" at 2H6 III.ii.306), the borders which women cross are primarily those of gender and gendered behaviour. D.E. Underdown notes, "Patriarchal authority within the family was the cornerstone of Elizabethan and Jacobean political theory, the ultimate, 'natural' justification for obedience to the state: to reject either was to threaten the entire social and political order."<sup>3</sup> Challenge to or rejection of traditional patriarchal authority surfaces time and again in the tetralogy. The Duchess of Gloucester and Margaret threaten "natural" social order, in which men take the active, determining roles; Henry VI fails in his patriarchal duty when he can father neither his son nor his land, disinheriting the one and failing to defend the other. His failure catalyses Margaret's action and assumption of control. On this level, York's actions can be seen as purgative, trying to set roles back to what he, as a man and warrior of his time, believes they should be. York is too male--action without thought. Henry is too female--thought and emotion without action. Richard too deceitful, an agent of Hell, "unnatural" and to some degree androgynous. Phyllis Rackin emphasises Richard's "appropriation of the woman's part," and adds, "Characterized throughout in terms of warlike masculinity and aggressive misogyny, Richard also commands the female power of erotic seduction. . . . Owner of both the sword and the naked breast, both penetrated ring and penetrating heart, Richard has become, as Rebecca Bushnell points out, 'both the man who possesses and the woman who submits.'"<sup>4</sup> Alone of all the men, Richard--already rendered partially Other through his physique and temperament, as his opening soliloquy evidences--assimilates elements of the feminine, rendering himself even more unnatural. Richmond balances all. He is both

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<sup>3</sup>D.E. Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 117.

<sup>4</sup>Phyllis Rackin, "Engendering the Tragic Audience: the Case of Richard III," Studies in the Literary Imagination 26 (1993): 54.

war-like and capable of realising the damage war brings to the land and her people-- an emotion which does him credit as a ruler, rather than rendering him unfit to be one. He gives God his due instead of paying him lip service as Richard does, and he emphasises unity both in his person, espousing Elizabeth, and in his speech, which ends the tetralogy.

Men's transgressions lie predominantly in the realms of duty and fealty. Men err by ignoring oaths and vows, to God and to temporal powers. These perjuries result in both "fatal" marriages, the contest for the crown, and numerous deaths. Richard ignores the bonds of family, as well as oaths sworn to supporters. The only oath kept, as Cairncross observes, is Clifford's, but his is not necessarily a wise one: "It is an oath of blind allegiance to Henry and blind vengeance on the house of York."<sup>5</sup> These male contraventions of form are typical, indeed expected (especially in a throne war), and whilst they account for plot movement, they do not hold the same sort of power or fascination that the women's breaches of etiquette and expected behaviour do. Margaret, Eleanor, Anne, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York all access, to some degree, a primal awe and power which arouses "both love and loathing in the male."<sup>6</sup> In varying degrees each also operates within the boundaries of cyclical female archetypes.

The cycle of femininity in the plays is important: Susan Bassnett observes,

[A]ll three [parts of Henry VI] use images of femininity as central metaphors in the delineation of events. Henry VI, Part I focuses on maidens . . . Henry VI, Part 2, focuses on wives . . . Henry VI, Part 3

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<sup>5</sup>1H6 liv. Clifford's oath is, however, most true to the standards of loyalty to liege and family. His Old Testament judgment, however, still needs to be replaced with Richmond's more merciful one.

The quickness and facility with which the characters, particularly the men, in these plays switch titles is remarkable; I have endeavoured to simplify matters. "Henry" will always refer to Henry VI; "York" to the Richard of York who is elevated to that title in 1H6; "Richard" to Richard III; "Gloucester" to Duke Humphrey; "Edward" to Edward IV; "Clifford" to the younger of the two Cliffords; "Warwick" to the kingmaker; "Salisbury" to Warwick's father (and not that Salisbury who dies in France); and "Elizabeth" to Edward's queen, unless specified otherwise. Names in citations should be able to be understood from context.

<sup>6</sup>This power of course is not limited to literary figures. As mentioned in previous chapters, some of these ambiguities may trace back to societal ambivalences about Elizabeth I.



presents two queens, Margaret, the avenging militaristic French wife of a king unwilling to fight, and Elizabeth, the new breed of queen from the minor English aristocratic family, who wins over the affection of the king through her sexuality and whose role appears to be that of bedmate and mother to numerous children by her two husbands.<sup>7</sup>

Richard III's women are mothers, in various stages of their lives and losses, though all ultimately end up destitute.<sup>8</sup> Madonne Miner notes "the progression of women in Richard III: from mother to nonmother, wife to widow, queen to crone."<sup>9</sup> Though the female imagery matures (and Bassnett notes that this parallels Henry's maturation), one must also note the way in which it is presented throughout the tetralogy.<sup>10</sup> There are three women in each of Henry VI plays, and although there are four women in Richard III, they operate, when they are in concert, in groups of three: Elizabeth/Anne/Duchess of York in IV.i; Elizabeth/Margaret/Duchess in IV.iv. In I.iii. Margaret and Elizabeth are paired as positive/negative images; in II.ii Elizabeth and the Duchess of York are dolorous partners; but never do all four women appear together.<sup>11</sup>

Shakespeare draws good/bad dichotomies throughout his work, and does not limit them just to women. However, the triple groupings are deeply significant,

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<sup>7</sup>Susan Bassnett, Shakespeare: the Elizabethan Plays (New York: St. Martin's, 1993) 23-24.

<sup>8</sup>Bassnett 24. This progression of maturity, as espoused here and by Bassnett, is one of the unifying themes of the tetralogy. For this to hold true one must accept Margaret in Richard III as a progression from the Margarets that have gone before. Her role changes; she is no longer central to the action; but she is the same character. Arguments which hold she is different, or an ahistorical hangover, need also to deal with other characters who span the tetralogy, such as the Yorks. If they are seen as synonymous with their earlier selves—and there is no appreciable change in Edward and Richard matures as a character, but does not overtly change personality—it is reasonable to see Margaret the same way. Shakespeare is well known for manipulating history to suit his purpose. Margaret is not the first ahistorical happening in the play.

Believing with Rackin that the generic demands alter the characters and events challenges the very nature and wholeness of the tetralogy. This study accepts the tetralogy and its unities—witches, unruly women, cursing, the conception of villainy and evil, and the abovenoted progression of maturity being among them.

<sup>9</sup>Madonne M. Miner, "Neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen': the Roles of Women in Richard III," Lenz 45.

<sup>10</sup>Bassnett 24.

<sup>11</sup>I here discount non-named roles, such as Simpcox's wife and Clarence's daughter, and concentrate on those characters Shakespeare deems important enough to name.

especially with regard to the witchcraft element in the plays. Hecate, goddess of the crossroads and of magic, is a triple goddess; or more accurately, she is the dark aspect of the triple moon goddess. The Fates, those beings who determine the course of men's lives, are also a triple deity. Shakespeare addresses this concept in Macbeth, embodying it in the three Weïrd Sisters, but it also informs his first tetralogy.<sup>12</sup>

Margaret of Anjou is the thread common to all four of the plays in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Other characters translate from play to play, and manage to survive for three of them, but no other character is seen in all four plays. Margaret's role is changed in Richard III, but not her history or her character. In her old age, she has stepped down from the platform of the virago, and taken up the mantle of the hag, complete with the bitter wisdom that her history and experience have brought her. Ralph Berry asserts that the women, especially in Richard III, form "the chorus. The women are the element of continuity in the Civil Wars: they suffer, but survive--as no man does."<sup>13</sup> In the latter three plays of the tetralogy all other women are strongly defined by the relation to and relationships with Margaret of Anjou. Examining them and these relationships illuminates the character and roles of Margaret herself.<sup>14</sup>

Eleanor Cobham, in every way, wants to be Margaret. She wants to be Queen in Margaret's stead, and as her dream states, preferably while Margaret lives. Like Margaret's, her vision is clear. She can see people and situations for what they are. In speech and action, she unknowingly (or perhaps knowingly, though the text holds no evidence of this) foreshadows Margaret: she controls her husband easily and, though it is not explicitly stated, manipulates him by use of her sexuality--this would explain Gloucester's sudden change of tone in I.ii.55. She tries unsuccessfully to persuade Gloucester to curse in II.iv, as Margaret will do successfully with Suffolk in III.ii.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir (1951; London: Methuen, 1974). Hecate also makes an appearance in this play, accompanied by three witches.

<sup>13</sup>Ralph Berry, Shakespearean Structures (London: Macmillan, 1981) 17.

<sup>14</sup>See chapter 4 for an analysis of the women in 1H6.



In addition, though she does not couch her words in either prophecy or curse, she clearly foresees what will happen to her husband. This speech, in II.iv, shows a real woman. Though still proud, Eleanor realises she has lost the game, and is exasperated that she cannot persuade her husband, whom she obviously loves, to see the truth or be dictated to by her common sense:

But be thou mild, and blush not at my shame  
Nor stir at anything till the axe of death  
Hang over thee, as sure it shortly will;  
For Suffolk, he that can do all in all  
With her that hateth thee, and hates us all,  
And York, and impious Beaufort, that false priest,  
Have all lim'd bushes to betray thy wings;  
And, fly thou how thou canst, they'll tangle thee:  
But fear not thou, until thy foot be snared,  
Nor never seek prevention of thy foes.<sup>16</sup>

Eleanor goes to exile, not death, though she knows she will not see her husband again. This, her exiting speech, lacks efficacy--it fails to do what she wants it to do--and it may be because it is neither a death curse nor a scaffold speech. If so, then the policy of exiling her is shrewd--she is removed from the political scene, but not in any way which would give undue weight or authority to her final words. Eleanor rues her loss, but, as Marilyn Williamson remarks, "She also correctly perceives that Margaret, the foreigner, is simply the extreme form of--and scapegoat for--the hatred among the English nobility."<sup>17</sup>

Eleanor's flaws are pride, which everyone in the tetralogy except Henry VI possesses, and ambition, which she possesses to an extraordinary degree. Eleanor's pride, fatally wounded in the fan-dropping scene, is what drives her finally to commit her act of treason. Unfortunately, whereas the situations of the other noblewomen in the tetralogy leave room for manoeuvring, there is no question that Eleanor is guilty

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<sup>15</sup>See II.iv.23-25 and III.ii.306-31.

<sup>16</sup>2H6 II.iv.48-57.

<sup>17</sup>Marilyn L. Williamson, "'When Men Are Rul'd by Women': Shakespeare's First Tetralogy," Shakespeare Studies 19 (1987): 49. Whether she is correct in stating that Margaret is an extreme form of hatred is discussed below.

as charged. She and Margery are the only two cut-and-dry villainesses of the tetralogy.

The conjury scene as portrayed in 2 Henry 6 is tamer than its representations both in Hall and in the Contention, Shakespeare's primary sources for the scene. Although Eleanor as early as I.ii initiates the actions which will fell her, and iterates her willingness to do injury in I.ii.63-67, still there is some small scope for hope: she speaks not of harm to the king, but good to herself (I.ii.77). One may conclude that her rage at Margaret's treatment of her drives her to phrase her questions ill. As they are finally given, the first damns her, as it directly contravenes Elizabethan statutes against divination and sorcery. However, though she conceives of the questions, Shakespeare does not make her directly guilty of conjury--she watches from a balcony whilst Bolingbroke orchestrates the summoning.

In contrast, the Contention's conjury scene has both Elnor and Margery firmly in the director's seats. Elnor both literally and figuratively oversees the scene; Margery, not Bolingbroke, assigns the roles in the conjuration, and prostrates herself so that she may "talke and whisper with the diuels below, / And coniure them for to obey my will."<sup>18</sup> Hall also grants Eleanor primary agency:

[D]ame Elyanour Cobham, wyfe to the sayd duke, was accused of treason, for that she, by sorcery and enchauntment, entended to destroy the king, to thentent to advaunce and promote her husbände to the croune. . . .At the same season, were arrested . . . ayders and counsailers to the sayde Duchesse . . . to whose charge it was laied, yt thei, at the request of the duchesse, had devised an image of waxe, representyng the kyng, whiche by their sorcery, a litle and litle consumed, entendyng therby in conclusion to waist, and destroy the kynges person.<sup>19</sup>

This version of Eleanor is less proud--for Hall does not hesitate to castigate pride where it exists, as even a brief perusal of his Union shows--and acts solely for her husband's sake, and so in that way is more sympathetic than Shakespeare's.

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<sup>18</sup>2H6 186-87.

<sup>19</sup>2H6 159.



Shakespeare's Eleanor, however, is powerless, despite her wealth and relative ability to manipulate her husband. For all her ambition, she does not possess Margaret's ability to act directly and efficiently, to step across or even bridge the boundaries between passivity and activity. In I.ii.63-67, she unwittingly sentences herself to failure:

Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,  
I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks  
And smooth my way upon their headless necks;  
And, being a woman, I will not be slack  
To play my part in Fortune's pageant.<sup>20</sup>

The last two lines are somewhat awkward. They contain a sense of futility--Eleanor's role is already scripted--but the opposition they create with the first three lines is not clear. They could mean that her part is scripted because she is a woman; that men are loath to play their parts; or even that her way is necessarily rough because of her sex. Futility is evident and unambiguous in the first three lines, but the follow-through to the last two is awkward because of the "and." A "but" would solve the problem; as it stands, no easy resolution presents itself.

Eleanor fails, and she becomes in the grand scheme of tragedy set up by Henry's marriage to Margaret almost insignificant, or no more than a prologue. The necromancy also recalls Joan's in 1 Henry 6, and Bassnett alleges that Eleanor is a structural parallel for Joan when she states, "Eleanor's downfall leaves the field clear for Margaret, who becomes a figure strongly reminiscent of Lady Macbeth, urging Suffolk and Henry to exert greater strength."<sup>21</sup> In fact, though Eleanor does not transgress any sexual boundaries, she is the better parallel for Lady Macbeth, at the same time as she is but a pale shadow of Joan. Eleanor is last seen in a white shift, a ghost of her former power, haunted by her former glory and doomed to wander the Isle of Man; Eleanor urges Gloucester (albeit unsuccessfully) to "exert greater

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<sup>20</sup>These words are especially interesting in light of Margaret's problematic relations with severed heads.

<sup>21</sup>Bassnett 25. However, Eleanor must foreshadow Lady Macbeth rather than the other way around.

strength." Like Eleanor Margaret also attempts to unsex herself, and unlike Lady Macbeth, when she gains power, she suffers no qualms of wit to undermine and defeat her. Margaret recognises that there is little use in persuading Henry to change his personality, and spends as much time urging him to flee and hide as she does to better his show of strength; her exhortations to Suffolk are part of the delicate emotional and verbal choreography of that scene.

There are two possible ways of interpreting Eleanor's Johannic echo. Margaret in 1 Henry 6 is explicitly set up as Joan's successor, in terms of trouble to the English and, eventually, martial prowess. Both Margaret and Joan are French and, moreover, Armagnac. However, only the first play of the tetralogy takes place in France. Eleanor serves not only as a reminder of the trouble Joan caused--and on a level of pure stagecraft this would count as an "audience recap"--but also transplants the threat of sorcery, witchcraft, and unruliness to English soil. That Eleanor herself fails is irrelevant in this context. Secondly, setting Margaret up as a successor to Eleanor, rather than to Joan, removes some of Margaret's threat, as Eleanor's is by far the lesser power. This allows Shakespeare to develop Margaret's power more slowly, till it climaxes in 3 Henry 6.<sup>22</sup> However, Eleanor also serves to prove Margaret's worth. Where Eleanor fails, Margaret succeeds, even in her youth and inexperience. Margaret even returns from the exile imposed upon her to witness the revenge of her claims when the Lancastrian Richmond takes the throne.

As in 1 Henry 6, epithets aptly demonstrate the way in which characters are seen. When a forceful or victorious character utters them, his or her view is likely to dominate. Eleanor is referred to by epithet or report six times: two are positive, and four are negative. The King refers to her as "sweet aunt"; Bolingbroke has "heard her reported to be a woman of an invincible spirit."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Gloucester, when he has heard her dream, expostulates "Presumptuous dame! ill-nurtur'd Eleanor";

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<sup>22</sup>Margaret never conjures spirits, and in that sense is in no wise a successor to either Joan or Eleanor.

<sup>23</sup>I.iii.143; I.iv.6-7.



Margaret calls her "proud dame," "contemptuous base-born callet," and "minion."<sup>24</sup>

Henry is an ineffectual ruler; Bolingbroke treasonous for seeking to know the lifespan of the king. Gloucester represents honesty in the play, and Margaret is victorious.

Were Eleanor not allowed her final scene, in which she comports herself with dignity as well as pride, the ill opinion of her would probably hold sway.

Henry's opinion of people is almost always at variance with the rest of the cast's; it is more sympathetic, more forgiving and, one can argue, more true. He sees Gloucester's innocence--or rather, lack of guilt as charged; he realises his own shortcomings, as in the "Come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better" scene; he recognises in Richmond England's hope of future peace; he can see past the front Margaret must present to the world to the woman beneath.<sup>25</sup> Gloucester's opinion is true as well--there is little to which Eleanor would not presume. Margaret's words come from jealousy--the understandable jealousy of a sixteen-year-old queen who finds herself being outshone in riches and power by an older, more experienced woman, but jealousy nonetheless.<sup>26</sup> Patricia-Ann Lee believes this jealousy is a sign of weakness in Margaret, "for she lacks the true qualities of royalty. In her jealousness of the duchess of Gloucester . . . she gives way to spiteful ill-temper, which demonstrates unqueenly lack of self-control."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in the first part of 2 Henry 6, especially after the apprehension of Eleanor, nothing suggests that Margaret behaves as anything except a young woman recently come into a new marriage and new entertainments (she delights in hawking, the spectacle of the false miracle, and

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<sup>24</sup>I.ii.42; I.iii.76, 83, 138.

<sup>25</sup>IV.ix.47; 3H6 I.i.271 and III.i.35-41.

<sup>26</sup>Marcelle Thiébaux gives Margaret's dates as March 23, 1439 to April 25, 1482. Margaret was crowned when she was sixteen. See Marcelle Thiébaux, ed. and trans., The Writings of Medieval Women (London: Garland, 1994). Though Shakespeare telescopes history in the Henry VI tetralogy, there is no reason to suspect that he intended the relative ages of his characters to be different than they were.

<sup>27</sup>Patricia-Ann Lee, "Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship," Renaissance Quarterly 39 (1987): 215.

the duel between master and apprentice), just as nothing in the play suggests that Eleanor is anything apart from an astute player of court politics whose final days have come. Eleanor is escorted from the stage in II.iv., however, not to be seen again; in III.i., the next scene and the beginning of the central act of the play, Margaret (in the absence of her husband who quits Parliament in his grief) starts playing political chess with Suffolk, Beaufort, and York, and becomes the queen in truth as well as title.

Margery Jourdain's role in 2 Henry 6 is brief; the differences between her role in the play and in Hall and the Contention are noted above. As the conjury scene stands, her role is limited: she is instructed to "be. . .prostrate, and grovel on the earth"; and she speaks the first words to the spirit and names it (though in the actual conjuration it could be that Southwell or Bolingbroke takes this essential step before her).<sup>28</sup> She is referred to as "Mother Jourdain" by Bolingbroke, and "Beldam" by York.<sup>29</sup> The one is a term of respect; the other, a pejorative. Common sense dictates that her comrades would respect her, and the instruments of the law would not. She must wield some power, though Shakespeare deprives her of the charming power that the Contention gives her, or she would not be the first to address the Spirit. Margery, however, commands the spirit, not as Lucan's Erictho does, by forcing the dead to live; nor do she and her comrades prepare a hellish brew, as the Weïrd Sisters do. Even a cursory glance at the scene reveals that she commands the spirit thus: "By the eternal God, whose name and power / Thou tremblest at, answer that I shall ask."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Bolingbroke is able to adjure Eleanor thus: "I pray you, go, in God's name, and leave us."<sup>31</sup> He also reassures Eleanor that "whom we raise / We will make fast within a hallow'd verge."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>I.iv.10-11; 23-25.

<sup>29</sup>I.iv.10, 41.

<sup>30</sup>I.iv.24-25. She in fact is not the interrogator, but the spirit, for all its omniscience, does not appear to notice.



People who are truly in the Devil's thrall cannot or do not pray effectively. They cannot say the paternoster or, more tellingly in this context, cannot speak the name of God without impediment or without cursing it.<sup>33</sup> This is underlined in Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton. They are certainly not capable of making any kind of hallowed ground. Nor does the audience hear any sort of blasphemous curse or ill-wish pass the lips of Margery or any of the conjurers, even though Bolingbroke demonstrates his verbal facility by speaking both in verse and prose. Even if one accepts the Spirit they summon as a devil, they do not pray to it or worship it in any way; they command it, and command it by use of God's name. Tellingly, Margery is not described as stooped, ugly, bowed, withered, or any other of the haggish adjectives normally applied to witches; Bolingbroke likewise shows no ravages of evil. Whilst the Contention labels Margery's lines "Witch," she is granted her name in 2 Henry 6.<sup>34</sup> They are simply what Eleanor calls them: "the witch of Eie" and "the cunning conjurer," professionals who make their living by their art.<sup>35</sup> Hence what Shakespeare presents in this conjury scene is not heretical and evil, merely illegal and treasonous. James Sharpe notes that the Act of 1604 fills this loophole by emphasising use of spirits rather than maleficium—acts of witchcraft rather than causing death become the focus.<sup>36</sup> In the Stuart time period Margery and Bolingbroke could be prosecuted as witches, but not in Tudor.

Margery Jourdain then acts outside the law--perhaps even the natural law, as learned theurgy and divination was a male sphere--but that is the extent of her crime. In this she may be compared to Margaret (the similarity of names is serendipitous),

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<sup>31</sup>I.iv.9-10.

<sup>32</sup>I.iv.21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. K.M. Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team (London: Routledge, 1962) 252.

<sup>34</sup>2H6 187.

<sup>35</sup>I.ii.75-76.

<sup>36</sup> James Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996) 91.

who as queen actually has the power either to change or enact law. With her comrades, Margery attempts to divine the future of the king, Somerset, and Suffolk: all men who could be said to be brought to their deaths by Margaret, despite her efforts to protect or control them. She ultimately cannot compensate for Henry's weakness; Suffolk is discovered and decapitated (though his pride and ambition are as much to blame for his downfall as anything else); and when she urges Somerset to stand up for himself and confront York, she precipitates York's armed uprising--though York, in his obsession, would have found another excuse to reband his troops ere long.<sup>37</sup>

3 Henry 6 presents Margaret with foils who pale in her shadow: Bona and Lady Elizabeth Grey. Bona appears but once, and has very little of import to say or do. Essays of Certain Paradoxes, published in 1616, notes that the monarch had sent "his chiefest friend the Earle of Warwick, whom he had sent vnto France, to treat of marriage betweene him and the Lady Bona . . . (wherein being deluded, hee became his mortallest enimie.)"<sup>38</sup> In the play, Bona serves to shift Warwick's allegiance to Margaret's faction, which Margaret accepts and honours. Bona represents the marriage which should have occurred, linking the royal houses of France and England as Henry V had done; however, Edward, prey to his passions and ever capricious where women are concerned, commits the second fatal marriage of the tetralogy by wedding Elizabeth.<sup>39</sup> This sets in motion the downfall of the house of York, just as Henry and Margaret's wedding set the stage for the loss of France and the downfall of the house of Lancaster. In fact, Hall censures the marriage between Edward and Elizabeth more than he does that between Henry and Margaret.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>For Margaret and Somerset, see V.i.85-86.

<sup>38</sup>Essays of Certain Paradoxes (London, 1616) B2.

<sup>39</sup>Edward's lust is often noted in Shakespeare; Hall calls him "king Edward, which loved well both to loke and to fele fayre dammosels" (3H6 158). Bona's name even means "good"; by betraying her, Edward leaves all good behind.

<sup>40</sup>3H6 158-59.



Elizabeth, however, escapes censure. Hall notes that when approached by Edward, "she verteously denied hym, but that she dyd so wysely and that with so good maner and woordes so wel set, that she rather kyndeled his desyre then quenched it."<sup>41</sup> This extract demonstrates once again the early modern link between a woman's verbal facility and her sexuality. Though Elizabeth is virtuous and wise, her "woordes wel set" entice the king to the fatal marriage. Despite Hall's acknowledgment of Edward's sexual propensities, his wording belies the fact that contemporaries could hold Elizabeth, rather than Edward, responsible for the marriage. Shakespeare parallels Hall's account of Elizabeth's verbal facility in 3 Henry 6 III.ii, in which Elizabeth shows herself to be well-spoken, aware of her place and position in society, and yet also aware of her own self-worth: "I know I am too mean to be your queen, / And yet too good to be your concubine."<sup>42</sup> She is a dutiful widow in 3 Henry 6, as she will be again in Richard III; and her motivation is couched in the following lines:

K.Edw. Now, tell me, madam, do you love your children?

L. Grey. Ay, full as dearly as I love myself.

K. Edw. And would you not do much to do them good?

L. Grey. To do them good, I would sustain some harm.<sup>43</sup>

This harks back to Bassnett's observation. Elizabeth defines herself quite clearly as a mother, and her actions and reactions throughout 3 Henry 6 and Richard III are defined by her children's situations. Even when last seen, she is being petitioned by Richard III for her daughter's hand in marriage. She responds that she would rather declare her daughter illegitimate, in an echo of Richard's machinations about her sons, and she achieves no small success by feigning submission to get out of the situation (nearly three hundred lines of dialogue would try anybody's patience) and then marrying her daughter to Richmond.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>3H6 175.

<sup>42</sup>III.ii.97-98.

<sup>43</sup>3H6 III.ii.36-39.

<sup>44</sup>R3 IV.iv.196-430.

Dealing with Elizabeth presents Shakespeare with a tricky problem. On the one hand, she is a Yorkist, and for desire of her Edward broke faith with France and precipitated years of war. On the other, she is the mother of Elizabeth, the wife of the future Henry VII, whose union ended the War of the Roses, and whose granddaughter occupied the throne at the time Shakespeare wrote.

He responds to the problem by making her quite a sympathetic character. She has pride, true, but only in keeping with her station--by the time of conflict in Richard III, she is just as anointed a queen as Margaret is. In some ways, the conflict between Elizabeth and Margaret echoes the one between Margaret and Eleanor, but in Richard III the antagonists are both mature women and mothers, and not without sympathy for each other. The first epithet accorded Elizabeth in Richard III is Margaret's: "Poor painted queen, vain flourish of my fortune."<sup>45</sup> "Vain" in this line means "futile," as well as "proud." When in IV.iv they meet again, in the Duchess' presence, Margaret spares time from her rejoicing to cut through all matters to the main evil, Richard. But Margaret's rejoicing is not without its share of bitterness; to read her long speeches as mere vitriolic outbursts is wrong. Though she states "These English woes will make me smile in France," she also says "Bear with me, I am hungry for revenge, / And now I cloy me with beholding it."<sup>46</sup> Though "cloy" does mean "sate," the OED also denotes "choke," "weigh down," and, all in the one definition, "to sate, surfeit, gratify beyond desire, to disgust, weary (with excess of anything)." Margaret herself acknowledges her weariness in line 112, in which she refers to her "weary head."

Never inhuman, merely a queen who has to learn the self-control she lacks at the beginning of 2 Henry 6 and learns so well that she can be York's tormentor in 3 Henry 6, Margaret can recognise a kindred grief. Her cry of "O, kill me too!" when the York faction kill her son in 3 Henry 6 V.v.41 is so heartfelt--Margaret is so much

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<sup>45</sup>I.iii.241.

<sup>46</sup>IV.iv.115, 61-62.



a mother, and has fought so hard for her son--that the stone mask she has worn in front of the Yorks cannot endure. It is possible that it is this honesty of feeling as much as Edward's weakness for the female sex which makes Edward stop Richard from granting Margaret's request. Margaret swoons at the death of her son, too--the only time she shows such weakness.

Therefore, when, in IV.iv of Richard III, Margaret catalogues the parallels between herself and Elizabeth in lines 82-115, it is not all in spite. If Elizabeth is scorned by Margaret, as Margaret says in line 102, it is because Elizabeth stays within the confines prescribed by society for dutiful wife and mother. She never fights for what she believes, as Margaret has had to do, and although Elizabeth has a certain verbal strength, it is a strength born of parrying, not attack. When Elizabeth confronts Richard about her daughter, she does not win by verbal thrust--she wins by retreating and negotiating in the wings. Her victories come from softness, not hardness; from pliancy, not strength--in fact, from typical feminine characteristics and tactics. Rackin defines Richard III as "the reconstruction of history as tragedy."<sup>47</sup> The spectator therefore sits on the boundary between the male-gendered audience of the history plays, and the female-identified or effeminised audience of a tragedy. Rackin avers,

[N]ot all of the spectators of tragedy were imagined as women. Nonetheless, the spectators were repeatedly and consistently described in contemporary accounts as moved to emotions and responses (compassion, remorse, pity, tears) that were understood as feminine. This conception of the effects of tragedy as feminizing, although not always explicitly stated, is remarkably consistent. . . .<sup>48</sup>

In a play in which issues of masculinity and femininity are being challenged, accepting Rackin's viewpoint is reasonable and redounds upon the characters

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<sup>47</sup>Rackin 47.

<sup>48</sup>Rackin 49.

themselves.<sup>49</sup> For this reason, then, the women in the play form a sort of Greek chorus, a unifying voice of shared suffering, necessarily female because of the effects of the action and the play itself. Suffering the tragedies of the play as both spectators and victims, they are doubly gendered female. Yet the women survive not only because they fill their womanly roles well, but because the action of the plays occurs so far from the traditional spheres of women, which none of the women in Richard III ever truly cross the boundaries of, except for Margaret.

Rackin believes,

In Richard III, the subversive power associated with the female characters in the earlier plays is demystified, and all of the power of agency and transgression is appropriated by the male protagonist. . . . Witchcraft, the quintessential representation of the dangerous power of women, is similarly reduced from a genuine threat to a transparent slander . . . [namely] Richard's unsupported and obviously false charges against Queen Elizabeth and Jane Shore.<sup>50</sup>

The power of transgression, specifically of gendered boundaries, is stronger than the power generated from within prescribed gender roles and actions. Elizabeth recognises this weakness as well, hence her plea to Margaret to teach her to curse in an attempt to empower her words. "My words are dull," says Elizabeth, "O quicken them with thine." Margaret concludes the couplet, and leaves the stage to her successors, having done all she can: "Thy woes will make them sharp and pierce like mine."<sup>51</sup>

But--and here is where Shakespeare redeems Elizabeth and leaves her free from taint--Elizabeth does not take on Margaret's verbal power. The Duchess of York, Richard's mother, attempts to, but Richard can ignore her, just as he mocks her blessing in II.ii.109-11. Elizabeth merely concludes with "Though far more cause, yet

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<sup>49</sup> One is also reminded of Macduff's claim that weeping is "playing the woman." William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir, Arden ed. (1951; London: Methuen, 1974) IV.iii.220.

<sup>50</sup>Rackin 52. Margaret is also calumniated as a witch, as discussion will show.

<sup>51</sup>IV.iv.124-25.



much less spirit to curse / Abides in me, I say Amen to her."<sup>52</sup> Because she stays physically, and much more important, verbally, within the polite spheres of womanhood, the remnants of her line can be joined to the valiant, shining Richmond; because the Duchess of York is an insufficient heir to Margaret, the cycle of violence and vengeance started in France closes, ironically, by the agency of a man at the head of French, or at least Breton, troops.<sup>53</sup>

Rackin posits that in this play,

even as the female characters are ennobled, they are also disempowered. On the one hand, women are much more sympathetically portrayed. On the other, they lose the vividly individualised voices and the dangerous theatrical power that made characters in the Henry VI plays potent threats to the masculine project of English history-making.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly the women in Richard III are defined by their roles, both in this play and in the history that the previous three plays have created. Women who remained inside traditional women's roles in the Henry VI plays do not escape them in Richard III. Their lack of transgressive behaviour robs them of dramatic impact. Those who are seen for the first time in Richard III play prescribed roles—wife, widow, crone—who seem swept up by the inevitability of the ending. Yet without their presence, "conveying a critique of the central transactions" and providing the "race memory of the nation . . . what the play knows,"<sup>55</sup> nothing would survive. As Richmond restores peace and a "good" role model, so the women in the play preserve their roles.

Readers and audiences have less to work on with the Duchess of York than they do with Elizabeth. The Duchess only enters the tetralogy in Richard III, despite the fact that her husband and children are present throughout. Hence there is less

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<sup>52</sup>IV.iv.197-98.

<sup>53</sup>Richard refers to Richmond's army as "A scum of Bretons and base lackey peasants. . .these overweening rags of France." V.iii.318-29.

<sup>54</sup>Rackin 51.

<sup>55</sup>Berry ix, 18.

time to get to know her. Bassnett claims with Berry that "The women in Richard III serve as a kind of chorus,"<sup>56</sup> of which the Duchess serves an integral part. The Duchess certainly is a crone. She is old York's wife, and York was not over-young when he was in France in 1 Henry 6. Rutland, by implication the youngest of her four children, dies in 3 Henry 6; by Richard III, all of her sons are grown men with families of their own, and she is past child-bearing. By the end of Richard III, she has lost all of her sons, Clarence to murder, Edward to death, and Richard to repudiation and Richmond. She tries to maintain family feeling with Elizabeth and with the children of Clarence, but fails. Her sins, too, are pride and self-love. Though she herself bemoans the loss of her blood, when she sees Elizabeth enter in mourning, she calls it "a scene of rude impatience"; and insists, in II.ii.71-88, in maintaining a kind of one-upmanship in grief. Elizabeth cannot rebut it; Dorset and Rivers sidestep it in comforting their mother and sister.

It is left to Margaret to out-riddle the Duchess' riddled grief. In II.ii, the Duchess concludes: "She for an Edward weeps, and so do I; / I for a Clarence weep, so doth not she; / These babes for Clarence weep, and so do I; / I for an Edward weep, so do not they."<sup>57</sup> In IV.iv, by number alone a doubling of II.ii, Margaret makes public her presence, summoned by Elizabeth's rather naive "who hath any cause to mourn but we":

If ancient sorrow be most reverend  
Give mine the benefit of seigniory,  
And let my griefs frown on the upper hand.  
If sorrow can admit society,  
Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine.  
I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;  
I had a husband, till a Richard kill'd him:  
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;  
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd him.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Bassnett 27.

<sup>57</sup>II.ii.82-85.

<sup>58</sup>IV.iv.34-43.



She uses the familiar "thou," acknowledging the familiarity and equality of rank between them. Whilst conceding the "thou," the Duchess tries to shift the blame to Margaret, and also tries to gain the verbal upper hand, but Margaret is too old a hand for her:

Duch. I had a Richard too, and thou didst kill him;  
I had a Rutland too: thou holp'st to kill him.

Marg. Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard kill'd him.<sup>59</sup>

Margaret makes the Duchess face the fact that her last child is "hell's black intelligencer," familiar to the Devil who ships souls to Hell.<sup>60</sup> She has failed as a mother to the extent that her last, unnatural son has denied even her blessing; all that remains is for her to cast off her only surviving child. She must cast off the trappings of motherhood and join Margaret in the margin which society reserves for old women, as Mother Sawyer finds in The Witch of Edmonton. Not an easy thing to do, and she has little success; Richard hears her with ill grace and drowns her out with drums. But she, recalling Joan, achieves some poor measure of dignity by exiting with a grand curse. Lacking Joan's or Margaret's personal power, however, she prophesies only what Margaret has already done, that Richard will come to no good end.<sup>61</sup>

The only woman in the play who does not act in concert with Margaret is the unfortunate Anne, though she, like others denied a parting shot at their enemies, gets to curse Richard and bless Richmond in V.iii. She harbours no illusions about what her alliance with Richard will bring. Antony Hammond claims that Anne, like Elizabeth, is one of the "real" characters in the play:

It has often been remarked that all the characters in the play (except for the Princes and Richmond) are at least partly guilty. This is so. . . .Anne . . . would not have fallen so readily into such a terrible

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<sup>59</sup>IV.iv.44-46.

<sup>60</sup>IV.iv.71-73.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. IV.iv.73-74 and 195-96.

mistake if she too had not been corrupt. The scene opens with her dreadful curses: Richard is right when he twits her that she knows no charity. Yet Anne, like Elizabeth, is characterised in a more realistic manner than Margaret or the Duchess. She and Edward's Queen . . . are believable as women. The others are mere monotones of complaint, and again it is alarming that the real and the surreal should blend so effectively in their quartets of grief and hate in Act IV.<sup>62</sup>

Hammond is partially right, at least. Anne does start to curse in the opening monologue of I.ii, and her curses are heavily ironic. She curses Richard's children to be, in effect, mirrors of him; and she curses his wife, whom she will become. Yet her curses do not come true *per se*. Richard never has children; his wife, far from being unhappy at his death, almost rejoices at her own release in her own. And, once again, cursing can be an invitation to evil: in this case, Richard enters. Hammond is far afield for the rest, however. If Anne has no charity, she is shown none: as a Neville and a Warwick, most if not all of her kin are gone, mostly killed by the house of York ("he hates me for my father Warwick," says Anne of Richard in IV.i.85); and marrying Richard may well be what she sees as her only course of action. Though she is young, the widow of Margaret's Edward, Anne's beauty, which should be the flower of youth, is cited and twisted by Richard to be the source of his own evil. Though she has spirit, she is no match for Richard's wit and, when offered the opportunity to kill Richard, lacks the strength to do so. She cannot wield a man's weapon; she cannot, even in self-defence or vengeance, kill. Here is the real difference between Anne and Margaret.<sup>63</sup> Though Anne is young, she is twisted quickly into a crone's bitterness, and she is never allowed to experience motherhood. Though in 3 Henry 6 Margaret describes Anne as "fair and virtuous," Anne's virtue, like her widowhood, is given short shrift in Richard III.<sup>64</sup> Again, her weakness, as she herself expresses it, is her

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<sup>62</sup>R3 110.

<sup>63</sup>David Daniell notes that in Terry Hands' celebrated late 70s RSC production of the Henries, Helen Mirren's Margaret did kill York, but only in self-defence, as he fell on her. David Daniell, "Opening up the Text: Shakespeare's Henry VI Plays in Performance," Themes in Drama 1: Drama and Society, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: CUP, 1979).

<sup>64</sup>3H6 III.iii.245.



"woman's heart," which "Grossly grew captive to his [Richard's] honey words, / And prov'd the subject of my own soul's curse."<sup>65</sup> Though Richard calls her "sweet saint," and "divine perfection of a woman," the truest observation is Dorset's, whose clear and religious vision echoes Henry's: "Farewell, thou woeful welcomer of glory."<sup>66</sup>

Joan is a maiden and warrior; Eleanor is a successful wife, but we see no Gloucester children and she fails to become Queen; Elizabeth is a wife, mother, and queen, but she lacks verbal and personal strength, though she possesses facility; the Duchess of York is a hapless, sterile crone whose curses are ignored and derivative; Anne is, quite frankly, entirely doomed, though clear-sighted. They are all linked to Margaret, who alone of all the women carries off each role successfully, and defies the doom placed on her. For this is she damned, particularly by the men in the plays. There are three aspects of her power: her sex and sexuality, and her willingness to use them; conversely, her assumption of traits seen to be masculine; and her wit and verbal power, which in the end manifests in curses and prayers.<sup>67</sup>

Margaret's beauty captivates both Henry and Suffolk. The first scene they have together, in 1 Henry 6 V.iii, is complex. Suffolk allegedly wishes to let Margaret leave the stage, but he cannot find it in his heart to let her go. The first part of the scene consists of Suffolk upbraiding himself for loving her, and ignoring all her questions. Next, Margaret, in a series of short apostrophes, declares herself to be "enthrall'd" by Suffolk, and ignores questions that Suffolk puts to her.<sup>68</sup> When he is slightly taken aback by this, she responds wryly: "I cry you mercy, 'tis but quid for quo."<sup>69</sup> Even at the beginning of the tetralogy, Margaret proves herself a verbal match for her captor. Her verbal facility does not decrease her desirability; it increases it.

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<sup>65</sup>IV.i.78-80.

<sup>66</sup>IV.i.89.

<sup>67</sup>Please see Appendix B for an analysis of cursing within the last tetralogy.

<sup>68</sup>1H6 V.iii.101.

<sup>69</sup>1H6 V.iii.109.

However, at this point, neither her power of speech nor her sexual desirability render her unruly. Not till the York faction meet her does her outspokenness work against her.

The farewell scene between Margaret and Suffolk is complex and delicate, and as touching a love scene as any Shakespeare has written. Daniell describes the scene as it was staged in Hands's production, one of the most discussed productions. Helen Mirren's Margaret falls for Suffolk, as any adolescent might; she and Henry also fall in love at first sight, and Margaret only realises the depth of her love for Henry when she sees him swoon at Gloucester's death. Therefore, says Daniell, Margaret's "parting scene with Suffolk is subtly changed in tone, now suggestive of two people whose hearts are not quite in what they do, and who very slightly over-play."<sup>70</sup> Williamson believes that "She has lost Suffolk, whom she loved passionately. . .but she assures Henry then that she would die for him, and we come to know the truth of that assertion. Margaret would die, not for love, but for the power that he should wield and does not."<sup>71</sup> Both are valid interpretations. The truth must lie somewhere between them. Margaret is a woman who, like Guinever, finds herself in love with two men, and this is part of the tragedy. Henry understands this, and his "Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk!" is the only reproach he offers her. After Margaret says she will die for him, Suffolk is not mentioned again between them. Margaret does not die for Henry, but she attempts to die for Henry's son--and it is after all for her husband's and more specifically her son's rights that she takes up arms. When denied death, with a practicality which she may have inherited from Joan, she gets on as best she can.

Margaret choreographs III.ii carefully, and remains verbally in control throughout. III.ii, with its abortive exits and recalls, is a structural parallel to 1 Henry 6 V.iii. Margaret's and Suffolk's last lines are interlocked and interwoven. Each

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<sup>70</sup>Daniell 259, 272.

<sup>71</sup>Williamson 50-51.



speaks half of the ultimate line in the scene. The dancers finish their dance, delicately, and with grace.

Margaret is at her most rueful, most appalled, when she realises she has been an agent of a death. She does not realise, in her inexperience, what the effect of Gloucester's loss will be on Henry; hence her horror when he faints. She realises belatedly that part of Suffolk's death must also be ascribed to her, thus her behaviour, almost disbelieving, almost obsessed, with Suffolk's head. Henry recalls her, and, adult, she responds. Her infatuation has passed; even when she recounts her woes in Richard III, she does not number Suffolk's death among them, nor does she place the blame for his death on anyone else. Daniell notes, as stated above, that her stabbing of York was portrayed as self-defence; he also notes that Margaret stayed almost in shock afterwards. She has learned to control and defend herself, but death and its effects still touch her. However, no matter how many reverses she suffers, she endures, adapting herself as best she can to topsy-turvy circumstances.

The very first scene of 3 Henry 6 sets up myriad inversions, just as the first scene of 1 Henry 6 does. The king is womanly; the queen becomes manly; and, somehow, those men who serve under her also effeminise themselves by commandeering a female form of speech just as they reassert their manliness by going to war rather than acceding to a demeaning and "effeminate peace." Power and powerlessness are explored in I.iv, York's death scene, for York is the next to curse. The first line of his last speech recalls Joan's grammatically and verbally: "There, take the crown, and with the crown my curse" cries York; "Then lead me hence, with whom I leave my curse," cries Joan.<sup>72</sup>

York has been reduced to such a state that his only weapons are words. He speaks from a position of powerlessness, and confronts a woman in a position of power, who wields both physical weapons and the power of the state that York considers his own. He says to Margaret: "Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;

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<sup>72</sup>3H6 I.iv.164; 1H6 V.iv.86.

/ Thou stern, indurate, flinty, rough, remorseless."<sup>73</sup> They have reversed positions, for York in I.iv is "pitiful and flexible." He achieves such eloquence in this scene that Northumberland, not Margaret, is reduced to tears--a further indication of the reversal which occurs in I.i.<sup>74</sup>

Williamson believes that verbosity, and particularly cursing, is a sign of almost complete powerlessness, and cites Margaret's adjuration to Suffolk in 2 Henry 6 III.ii: "Enough, sweet Suffolk; thou torments thyself; / And these dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass, / Or like an overcharged gun, recoil / And turn the force of them upon thyself."<sup>75</sup> Williamson's gloss is that "the expression of rage increases the sense of impotence on the part of the powerless speaker."<sup>76</sup> Whilst this statement is inaccurate when applied to Margaret, it holds true for Suffolk, who is bereft of power in his parting scene, and it also holds true for York.

York's impotent fury is spent entirely on Margaret, though he spares a single "Hard-hearted Clifford" for that Lancastrian. The section of his soliloquy beginning "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide," is the speech most critics cite if and when they discuss Margaret of Anjou.<sup>77</sup> Margaret's villainy resides in the fact that she dipped a handkerchief in Rutland's blood, and dares to use a child's death to torment his father. Critics deduce from York's condemnation that Margaret is indeed indurate and flinty.

Consider, however, the source of the description. In 2 Henry 6 V.i.117-18, York starts his campaign against Margaret with the phrase "O blood-bespotted Neapolitan, / Outcast of Naples, England's bloody scourge!" Like the "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide," this epithet is held to reveal Margaret's character.

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<sup>73</sup>I.iv.141-42.

<sup>74</sup>Northumberland issues the effective curse in that scene.

<sup>75</sup>328-331.

<sup>76</sup>Williamson 50.

<sup>77</sup>137-49.



However, as Daniell observes, "it is said by an egomaniac in response to the first check he has received, and even if York be played otherwise, it is hard to see why Margaret is 'blood-bespotted' compared to York himself."<sup>78</sup> In 3 Henry 6, York falls to the only person who has managed ever to check him; that she is a woman adds insult to injury. York is a villain, founder of the house which wrongly usurps Lancaster and fells the righteous Henry before succumbing to the avenging Lancastrian Richmond, yet his is the word which is held to define Margaret. Hall partially acknowledges what must be York's charisma and partial right when he notes, "Rychard duke of Yorke, perceivng the Kyng to be a ruler not Ruling, & the whole burden of the Realme, to depend in the ordinaunces of the Quene & the duke of Suffolke, began secretly to allure to his frendes of the nobilitie, and privatly declared to them, his title and right to the Crowne."<sup>79</sup> But if York's is even a partial right, Hall notes that it is first the king's fault, and then the Queen's, for the inversion of roles comes from the king's being "a ruler not Ruling."

What is remarkable about York's charisma is that it predisposes critics to accept his view. Speaking about Richard III, Williamson notes "Now it will be he, not Margaret, who murders children. . ."<sup>80</sup> In attempting to defend Margaret, Williamson slips into the error that Margaret actually kills Rutland. Hastings, in Richard III, also seems to subscribe to this view.<sup>81</sup> Angela Pitt also accepts York's view; she states, "Margaret is the most relentlessly sustained symbol in Shakespeare of all that is unnatural . . . beause she lacks womanly qualities. In their place she has those that are the glory of a man but grotesque in a woman."<sup>82</sup> This is the Yorkist view of Margaret, just as the vision of Joan that conquers 1 Henry 6 is the English

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<sup>78</sup>Daniell 266.

<sup>79</sup>2H6 165.

<sup>80</sup>Williamson 54.

<sup>81</sup>R3 I.iii.184.

<sup>82</sup>Angela Pitt, Shakespeare's Women (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1981) 151-52.

view. Neither Henry nor Suffolk, the two men closest to Margaret, condemns her for grotesqueness. Nor does Margaret lack wifely or motherly feeling. The Yorkist revision of Margaret extends to her outer appearance. York twits Margaret about her lack of beauty, to the extent that when Hammond notes that parallels can be drawn between the Senecan Helen and Margaret, he inserts "not in looks, one hastens to add."<sup>83</sup> Yet Margaret is held by all sources except York to be wondrous fair: Suffolk describes her as "fairest beauty," "nature's miracle," "this gorgeous beauty," and of course famously states "She's beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd; / She is a woman, therefore to be won."<sup>84</sup> Henry remarks, "Her sight did ravish"; Oxford refers to her as "our fair Queen and mistress"; Lewis calls her "Fair Queen of England, worthy Margaret."<sup>85</sup> Even Hall states "This woman excelled all other, aswell [sic] in beutie and favor, as in wit and policie."<sup>86</sup> Ironic, then, that the villain York's view survives, when even Richard acknowledges that York speaks "from bitterness of soul."<sup>87</sup> This bitterness of soul leads York to denigrate Margaret's looks, in order to convince himself that her outside matches what he believes her inner nature must be.

Part of York's rage is due to the fact that he perceives Self and Other to have been reversed or inverted. He considers himself an active, driving, controlling male; he is forced to see in himself powerlessness, helplessness, and weakness, which he was wont to consider feminine. Margaret has usurped these qualities, and thus with them York's self-definition. The only two men who are not threatened by the inversion which Margaret represents are Henry, castigated as womanish or effeminate throughout the tetralogy, and Richard, whom no one considers natural.

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<sup>83</sup>R3 81.

<sup>84</sup>1H6 V.iii.46, 54, 64, 78-79. Richard parallels this speech in R3 when he says of Anne: "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd? / Was ever woman in this humour won?" (I.ii.231-32).

<sup>85</sup>2H6 I.i.32; 3H6 III.i.167, 1.

<sup>86</sup>2H6 161.

<sup>87</sup>R3 I.iii.179.



Inversely, though he states he does not believe her to be a woman, York strikes where he believes a woman must feel it most: at her child and at her beauty. At some level York must see that Margaret has not left her womanly qualities behind; the violence with which he treats her demonstrates (again, like Guyon in the *Bowre of Bliss*) how much he feels threatened, how deeply he is defeated. Just as Margaret is not ugly, so too is she not without pity. She must steel herself to display the control she needs to torment York, and York is he who goads her to it: "Alas, poor York! but that I hate thee deadly, / I should lament thy miserable state."<sup>88</sup>

Shakespeare laces 3 Henry 6 V.v with irony: Having helped to kill York, and having taunted him with Rutland's death, Margaret is forced to watch her son's murder. She cries,

You have no children, butchers; if you had,  
The thought of them would have stirr'd up remorse:  
But if you ever chance to have a child,  
Look in his youth to have him so cut off  
As, deathsmen, you have rid this sweet young prince!<sup>89</sup>

She repeats herself at her exit: "So come to you and yours as to this prince!"<sup>90</sup>

Margaret must despise them for killing her son; however, her speech implies that the York faction's sin lies not in the action itself, but the manner of it, untempered by pity, remorse, or any finer, empathic feeling.<sup>91</sup> As Margaret's son is stabbed because, essentially, Margaret is his mother ("Take that, the likeness of this railer here," states Edward<sup>92</sup>), when Richard says of young Prince Edward that "He is all the mother's,

<sup>88</sup>84-85. Her lines directly parallel the encounter between York and Old Clifford in 2H6 V.ii., and, as Cairncross rightly argues, "There is much virtue in a 'But that'" (2H6 xxviii).

<sup>89</sup>61-64. Margaret's son's death is made more painful because he conducts himself in a brave, manly fashion, daring to throw the truth at the Yorkists; Edward stabs him almost because he is made in Margaret's, not Henry's image. He is, as Edward says, "this likeness of this railer here" (38).

<sup>90</sup>80.

<sup>91</sup>See Appendix B for further discussion of this scene.

<sup>92</sup>3H6 V.v.38.

from the top to toe,"<sup>93</sup> the reader senses the boy's future death. When Yorkists kill children, they blame their mothers, clearly displacing guilt to the distaff side.

Bitter though she may be, essentially friendless, contemporary of none save the Duchess of York, no one in the play except Richard can or does lay any charge of villainy on Margaret in Richard III. Many critics, however, call her an avenging Fury. The Erinyes were notorious for prosecuting family sins with no redress to pity (witness Orestes). They had no mercy, only justice. Harold Brooks claims, "The old type of vengeance, itself a new crime, perpetuating the Senecan chain of wrong and curse on royal houses, is embodied in her; it is superseded by vengeance which is God's, is just, and calls for no further vengeance, when Richmond is made the minister of chastisement."<sup>94</sup> Hammond alleges she "is almost entirely ritual: a crazed figure of impotence brought back from the past to represent the brutal, un-Christian, Old Testament concepts of retributive justice which Richmond effectively negates with his New Testament of forgiveness and reconciliation."<sup>95</sup> Critics therefore either acknowledge her right whilst condemning her actions, or, with Brooks and Hammond, set her up almost in opposition to God's will, on the one hand as "a new crime," and on the other as almost pagan or Jewish in her outlook, and therefore impotent.

This is still the same woman who was married to and loved by the holy Henry. Brooks and Hammond suffer from the York syndrome--they accept the word of the villain against Margaret. Margaret, as has been shown above, is not without fellow-feeling for the other women in the play; she is not uniformly vitriolic, or even all-banning, for she exempts Buckingham from her curses. Though she excites awe in the Grey faction, and they try to discredit her, they never call her anything worse than

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<sup>93</sup>R3 III.i.156.

<sup>94</sup>Harold F. Brooks, "Richard III', Unhistorical Amplifications: The Women's Scenes and Seneca," Modern Language Review 75 (1980): 722.

<sup>95</sup>R3 109.



"false-boding woman."<sup>96</sup> Richard, on the other hand, who holds her in the highest respect (much as Talbot does with Joan), calls her "foul wrinkled witch" and "thou hateful withered hag."<sup>97</sup> He does not try to discredit her curses, but he does try to reflect them, in strict obedience to Barry's and Thomas's observations above. And that Richard holds the power of cursing, especially just cursing, in awe is evident in I.iii.318-19, where he specifically breaks off so as not to curse himself.

Margaret is set up directly as Richard's most powerful enemy. Williamson refers to her as "Richard's psychic opponent," a not inapt phrase.<sup>98</sup> Richard acknowledges her a worthy enemy not only by his fear of her words but by his agreement with her analysis in I.iii.261. Only Margaret has the strength of character and the capability of wit to stand against Richard. Margaret is Richard's opposite, and as he is the villain, she cannot be. Lancaster cannot have any taint of villainy in Richard III, for Richmond claims his title by his Lancastrian descent. Accepting Richard's view that she is a "foul wrinkled witch" is therefore a misreading.

Though it is beyond the scope of the current study to analyse Richard's character fully, it is worth noting that all other crimes aside, Richard is not guilty of deceiving himself.<sup>99</sup> He admits all of his flaws both to himself and to the audience, primarily in soliloquys, and retains throughout the plays a keen and analytical intelligence. When once Margaret has proved herself an able adversary, he accepts that situation precisely. When she makes an apt comment, he recognises it, as in I.iii.261 ("Good counsel, marry!"); ironically, he alone in the cast readily acknowledges that Margaret has just cause for discontent ("I cannot blame her").<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>I.iii.247.

<sup>97</sup>I.iii.164, 215.

<sup>98</sup>Williamson 42.

<sup>99</sup>Much of the body of criticism which exists on Richard III concerns itself with Richard; little with the characters of the women around him.

<sup>100</sup>I.iii.306.

When he offers to kill her, he accords her the same status as he would any Lancastrian warrior. Edward, whose weakness for women (and underestimation of their effects) punctuates 3 Henry 6, spares her.

Richard is demonic, "hell's black intelligencer," and acknowledges himself twisted. When he enters in Richard III I.ii, in response to Anne's cursing, the pallbearers avert their eyes. One can almost see them make the ward against the evil eye. Anne snaps "What, do you tremble? Are you all afraid? / Alas, I blame you not, for you are mortal, / And mortal eyes cannot endure the devil."<sup>101</sup> Converses exist in the Spirit, who in 2 Henry 6 trembles at the name of the Lord, and in Margaret. When first she enters the tetralogy, Suffolk chides himself: "Wilt thou be daunted at a woman's sight?"<sup>102</sup> In Richard III, when she speaks with the righteousness of God and a fully anointed Queen, Margaret upbraids the guilty Greys and Richard: "Which of you trembles not, that looks on me? / If not that I am Queen you bow like subjects, / Yet that by you deposed you quake like rebels. / Ah, gentle villain! do not turn away."<sup>103</sup> Certainly she exercises some of the archetypal power Bassnett speaks of. But her power does not lie in witchery, though Richard cries her a witch. The witchcraft in Richard III is a blatantly false one, and the accused, Mistress Shore, is never brought on stage. A clearer instance of scapegoating does not exist.

Where then does this leave Margaret, who begins as "The happiest gift that ever marquess gave, / The fairest queen that ever king receiv'd" and "England's happiness," and finishes "well-skilled in curses" and self-confessedly "wretched"?<sup>104</sup> Shakespeare is not without pity for her. His title character, Henry VI says of his wife "she's a woman to be pitied much."<sup>105</sup> Lee notices that "In Polydore Vergil's view

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<sup>101</sup>43-45.

<sup>102</sup>1H6 V.iii.68

<sup>103</sup>1H6 i.iii.160-63.

<sup>104</sup>2H6 I.i.15-16, 37; R3 IV.iv.116, 8.



Margaret was a figure of tragedy rather than of evil. Although she precipitated many of the troubles of the reign she was not herself without dignity and even a kind of nobility."<sup>106</sup> Her story has a kind of tragic inevitability about it. Hall praises Henry VI for his "parfite mynde," but he describes Henry using the terms which Holinshed condemned Joan for lack of. Hall's wording is (probably unknowingly) ambiguous: "During this tyme of this truce. . .a sodain mischief, and a long discorde, sprang out sodainly, by the meanes of a woman: for kyng Henry. . .was a man of meke spirite, and of a simple witte, preferring peace before warre. . .In hym reigned shamefastnesse, modestie, integritie, and pacience to be marveiled at."<sup>107</sup> Though Hall never specifically mentions Henry's bouts of insanity, he does wonder whether Henry leaves his Scottish refuge because "he wer paste all feare, or was not well stablished in his parfite mynde."<sup>108</sup> Hall invokes contemporary opinion of Henry when he narrates that "This yll chaunce & misfortune, by many men's opinions happened to him, because he was a man of no great wit, such as men comonly call an Innocent man, neither a foole, neither very wyse."<sup>109</sup>

Margaret marries this man, womanly in outlook both in sources and Shakespeare. His weakness is infectious; both Hall and Shakespeare note that whenever Henry is present on the battlefield, the royal forces lose, despite Margaret's best efforts.<sup>110</sup> His transgression is therefore the stronger one, able to overcome Margaret's "stomack and corage, more like to a man, than to a woman"<sup>111</sup> Criticizing

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<sup>105</sup>2H6 III.i.35-40. Given that Scot et al. agree that prophecy no longer exists, Henry's accurate prophecies raise him to a saintly level. One may choose to doubt his vision, but the tendency is to trust it, despite his physical and kingly failings. Prophecy is discussed further in Appendix B (see pages 332-33 and 337-38), though treatment of the topic is constrained by space, as is treatment of the uncanny.

<sup>106</sup>Lcc 207.

<sup>107</sup>2H6 162-63, emphasis mine. Compare 1H6 152-53, cited in chapter 4.

<sup>108</sup>3H6 156.

<sup>109</sup>3H6 166.

<sup>110</sup>3H6 152, II.ii.73-75.

<sup>111</sup>2H6 161.

the king, however, is a dangerous proposition. Lee points out that, historically, scapegoating Margaret began during her reign:

After 1459, however, there were beginnings of those rumors and libels which would undermine her reputation as a queen and as a woman. Finally, under the pressure of factional strife, the full picture of the ambitious woman, the virago with the spirit of a man, the adulterous queen, began to appear. If the king could not easily be criticized, a Frenchwoman whose family members were enemies of the realm, could become his surrogate, a useful device in an age of growing literacy in which both rumor and propaganda could and did enforce popular opinion.<sup>112</sup>

Lee also notes that no less prominent a figure than Pope Pius II concerned himself with Margaret of Anjou. The Pope's writings

present sentiments and expressions which the Pope thought to be characteristic of the Queen's public character and which he must have believed would be accepted by his readers. Thus, in the speech to the French king, he makes her denigrate her husband as a man "who ought to have been a woman," allows her to recount the story of her troubles and then puts into her mouth a request for aid which has almost nothing of the supplicant in it. Queen speaks to king, leader speaks to leader, without apology. The same bold and masculine character was evident in his report of her speech to her captains. . . .The episode concludes with the reactions of her auditors.

"All marveled at such boldness in a woman, at a man's courage in a woman's breast, and at her reasonable arguments. They said that the spirit of the Maid, who had raised Charles to the throne, was renewed in the Queen."<sup>113</sup>

Everything returns to Joan, the prime example of an unruly woman. In the seventeenth century, as Williamson observes, Thomas Heywood, whose sympathetic portrayal of unruly women is discussed in chapter 11, includes Margaret of Anjou (and Elizabeth I) among his nine female worthies; and in Heywood's *Gynaikeion*, "Heywood tells a sympathetic history of Joan La Pucelle, concluding with a comparison to Margaret of Anjou, who is praised for her 'courage, resolution, and

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<sup>112</sup>Lee 193-94.

<sup>113</sup>Lee 198-99.



magnanimities."<sup>114</sup> Margaret is clearly Joan's successor, and not only in Shakespeare's mind and plays. Both these women take upon themselves the roles that the men around them cannot, and in doing so usurp what is seen as manliness. Shakespeare's Joan's prowess is primarily martial, though she can play at verbal fencing as well. Margaret is more threatening, in that her power is political, martial, and verbal. Yet neither of these women ever truly fall into the well of darkness into which most critics seem ready to jettison them. They stand out amongst the other women in the plays with whom they interact. Few remember the Countess of Auvergne from 1 Henry 6; though Margaret is introduced in Act V, Joan remains the dominant woman in the play. When Margaret plays against women like Eleanor Cobham, Elizabeth Grey, or the Duchess of York, they fade into her shadow, because she manages to fill all the roles they do, and more.

For Margaret, despite her status as virago, manages never to let the audience forget that she is female, and feminine. She may be warrior, but she is also quintessentially maiden, mother, wife, and crone. Despite her sexual transgressions, she never forgets her sex. This ability to combine roles, without recourse to any external or infernal power, and without losing her sense of self or self-worth, ultimately is her strength, and what allows her to survive the tetralogy without being burned, stabbed, poisoned, or successfully exiled. Lady Macbeth, despite her personal, intellectual, and verbal power, loses sight of Self (as does her husband) and therefore ultimately fails in her pursuits. The Witches in Macbeth inhabit the realm of sexual ambiguity and liminality, and never truly enter the realm of the physical and real. Their portrayals, therefore, whilst they hold the occasional frisson of horror, merge into the cyclical darkness which frames the play, and never quite achieve the force and lasting impact of the individual viragos of Henry VI.

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<sup>114</sup>Williamson 43-44.

CHAPTER 7. YOU SHOULD BE WOMEN--THE CASE OF MACBETH

*...What are these,  
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,  
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me,  
By each at once her choppy fingers laying  
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.*

Macbeth I.iii.39-47<sup>1</sup>

Macbeth is concerned with exploration of gender, androgyny, power and its betrayal. In the sense that any woman who takes on the power of a man, or any liminal figure who displays un- or misunderstood power of speech, is likely to fall under the label of "witch," then Macbeth is a witchcraft play. Whether or not one accepts a diabolic element, the characters within the play certainly believe the Macbeths to be either bewitched or converted to the forces of evil. Lady Macbeth becomes, in the victorious Malcolm's words, a "fiend-like queen," Macbeth a monster. Peter Stallybrass notes rightly that, "Witchcraft beliefs are one way of asserting distinctions. . . . They can be used, for instance, to account for the 'unnatural' ambition of a rival or for the 'unnatural' power of a woman."<sup>2</sup> In Macbeth Shakespeare manages effectively to blur the distinctions, or at least to render them powerless.

Macbeth, however, is not a play about resolution. Its action is not closed and finite. The evil which dwells in the hearts of the wrongdoers is not exorcised with or by the deaths of Lady Macbeth and her husband. Shakespeare offers proof, both in the text and in context which is understood by Renaissance occult belief, that just as

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir, Arden ed. (1951; London: Methuen, 1974). Hereafter all references to Macbeth, Holinshed, and Buchanan from this edition. The spelling "Weird Sisters" is Arden's.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Stallybrass, "Macbeth and Witchcraft," Focus on Macbeth, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 1982) 190.



Macbeth steps into a waiting cycle which carries him through the play to his death, so too does Macduff, by killing Macbeth, start another inevitable cycle of evil at the end of the play which belies the apparent victory of Malcolm and his ilk.

The play is framed, if not driven, by witchcraft and the occult. The Weïrd Sisters are called "Three Witches" in the dramatis personae, and they introduce the play and set its tone. However, they are not alone in either design or effect. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are included in occult discourse at varying levels and to varying effect. Both assume the metaphorical and sexual liminality which is set up by the Weïrd Sisters at the beginning of the play, and which has caused a critical tangle that must be sorted to understand Macbeth fully.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Marienstras describes the play as "the depiction of the personal, social, and cosmic disorders unleashed by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth under the patronage of the witches," thereby implying that the Sisters play a role which overarches and frames the action of the play.<sup>4</sup> He states that their purpose is "to recreate a whole, following a recipe and laws that are theirs alone - instead of integrating themselves with the organism that the cosmos represents, and ascertaining , [sic] through this very integration, that it remains what it is and what it should be."<sup>5</sup>

Lorraine Helms, herself very much a champion of the Sisters, notes that Terry Eagleton "dismantles the traditional image of Macbeth's witches to argue that they can embody creativity rather than chaos, community rather than conspiracy."<sup>6</sup> David Young, however, de-emphasises their role. Whilst noting that the witches "both

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<sup>3</sup>Whether or not certain passages are Middletonian insertions does not, by and large, concern this discussion. The text under examination is that of the Arden edition; i.e., with the Hecate scenes, but without the songs and dances actually inserted.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Marienstras, New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 73.

<sup>5</sup>Marienstras 85.

<sup>6</sup>Lorraine Helms, "Acts of Resistance," The Weyward Sisters, eds. Dympna Callaghan, Lorraine Helms and Jyotsna Singh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 131.

predict his [Macbeth's] fate and tempt him to it," he argues that "Shakespeare is careful to limit our sense of their supernatural power and meanings by emphasizing, especially on their second appearance, their pettiness and small-scale evildoing."<sup>7</sup> By this he means that despite their visual impact on the audience and psychological impact on the characters in the play, the Weïrd Sisters are essentially village witches, denizens of "low" culture. As such their fascination for the audience or reader is that outlined by Stallybrass and Allon White, in which revulsion and attraction vie equally to dominate the attraction of the Other perceived as "low," morally and politically.<sup>8</sup> James Nosworthy, whilst stating that the Sisters tempt Macbeth to his eternal damnation, also states that they "have a repertoire of music-hall tricks which, when set besides the magic of Prospero, expose them as the merest of amateurs."<sup>9</sup> Both Nosworthy and Young, then, attempt to demote the Weïrd Sisters to petty witches of the type exemplified by Mother Sawyer in The Witch of Edmonton.

Even the layman's common assumption that Macbeth's witches dabble in diablerie comes under attack. François Laroque speaks of "perverted maternity," and Jonathan Bate notes the Sisters' conversion at Middleton's hands "into the kind of overtly evil singing and chanting witches who had appeared in Jonson's Masque of Queens and about which he wrote his own The Witch."<sup>10</sup> Bate claims that originally the Weïrd Sisters "would have been morally ambiguous creatures who do nothing more than give voice to equivocal, mysterious solicitings, oracular prophecies."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Katharine Briggs divorces the Weïrd Sisters from any diabolical

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<sup>7</sup>David Young, The Action to the Word (London: Yale UP, 1990) 109; 108-09.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgressions (London: Methuen, 1986) 4-5.

<sup>9</sup>James M. Nosworthy, "Macbeth, Doctor Faustus, and the Juggling Fiends," Mirror up to Nature: Essays in Honour of Hibbard, ed. J.C. Gray (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984) 211.

<sup>10</sup>François Laroque, "Magic in Macbeth," Cahiers Elisabethains 35 (1989): 59; Jonathan Bate, "Shakespeare's Tragedies as Working Scripts," Critical Survey 3 (1991): 126

<sup>11</sup>Bate 126.



proceedings, invests them with a kind of dignity, and specifically denies what Young and Nosworthy claim:

[H]er [Hecate's] presence differentiates them from common witches, and gives them at least a link with the supernatural which is not purely diabolical. Here is no ordinary matter of a diabolic pact; they serve the goddess of the witches, and as subjects rather than worshippers; so that she connects these witches with the strigae of classical antiquity, and with the hags and fairies that descended from them.<sup>12</sup>

Briggs also denies to the Sisters the autonomous power which Marienstras grants them: rather than setting and following their own rules, she regards them as minions of a greater power, namely Hecate.

Elizabeth Truax, however, demonstrates most spectacularly the confusion generated by witches, witchcraft, and bewitching in Macbeth in a passage which reads almost as if it were trying to represent three viewpoints at once, and support them all:

When Macbeth agrees to Lady Macbeth's demands, he surrenders to Vice and allows himself to be ruled by pride. He has not been transformed by a magical charm conjured up by the witches, like the god-sent furies who transformed Hercules into the murderer of his family. Nor has Lady Macbeth bewitched him; she retains her mortal form, and her powers are merely temporal. But Macbeth is indeed bewitched because Lady Macbeth's demands touch his deep-seated ambitions and unleash his licentious greed. Although Macbeth moves like a man caught up in a bloody nightmare, he alone is responsible for his actions.<sup>13</sup>

Here the question of witchcraft is displaced entirely from the Weïrd Sisters and relegated to the parts of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Truax both cedes to and denies Lady Macbeth the catalyst or the agency for her husband's actions; she grants to Macbeth himself both free will and the capacity to bewitch himself. Although Truax demonstrates herself an "imperfect speaker" in this passage, she does approach what must be considered the central, pivotal relationship in the play, both in terms of overt and occult action--that between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. This relationship is

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<sup>12</sup>K.M. Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team (London: Routledge, 1962) 78-79. Briggs' work remains the most influential and cited.

<sup>13</sup>Elizabeth Truax, "Macbeth and Hercules: The Hero Bewitched," Comparative Drama (1989): 370.

every bit as problematic as the Sisters' nature. They prove themselves true lovers, co-conspirators, and even each others' familiars or demons within the course of the play. Together, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth transgress or elide the boundaries or distinctions between self and other, male and female, occult and mundane. They combine to form an effective dyad which, as long as it is whole, emits an energy or drive to action which is irresistible. Constance Jordan refers to this sort of coupling as "the oxymoronic union of self and other which will . . . be the basis, first, of the stability of the couple, and thus the family; and second, of the state."<sup>14</sup> Jordan refers to Sidney, and to a union within one physical body; Shakespeare takes this union and externalises it, enabling both sexes to participate. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth function as two halves of a self which admit no other, or perhaps classify everyone else in the play as other. Both cross traditionally gendered boundaries to do so. For Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, however, gender transgression is not taking on aspects of the other partner, but attempting to function independently, as "man" and "woman." When they so attempt, their self-definitions falter and fail. Their fragmentation is echoed in the fragmentation of the state; the disintegration of the Macduff family underlines state disintegration, and bodes ill for the future.

Macbeth's ambiguous gender is not limited to his marriage; it is reinforced by his dealings with magic and the occult. Macbeth can be considered a witch. Though women predominated historically in the witch trials, men were accused. Two notable cases of which both Shakespeare and James I would have been aware are John Fian, leader of the North Berwick witches in whose case James (then James VI) took a personal interest, and the devils of Denham, stage-managed by a cozenor who took advantage of the alleged possessions.<sup>15</sup> Critical minds were at work in the latter case; the most famous contemporary voice writing about Denham is Harsnett's. Harsnett

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<sup>14</sup>Constance Jordan, Renaissance Feminism (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 223.

<sup>15</sup>For a full analysis of this case, see F.W. Brownlow, Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham (London: Associated UP, 1993).



himself was a sceptic: as Robert West notes, "Harsnett himself, then chaplain to the bishop of London, was for a long time Scot's most imposing admirer among English writers."<sup>16</sup> Scepticism does not apply in Macbeth, however. Marjorie Garber calls Macbeth "a male Medusa," and likens him to the Green Man as well. She notes that the Green Man as male Medusa was a trope found in England, and furthermore underlines the problematic associated with calling any of the main characters in the play either witch, man, or woman, especially if they wield any kind of power: "The rational goddess can also be an irrational monster; wisdom can be transformed to war. . . .As for the Green Man, a type of the male Medusa, he is terrifying precisely because he is, and is not, man."<sup>17</sup> Laroque also sees Macbeth as a male Medusa and states, "In the play, the possible translation of Medusa into a Green Man or Wodewose is an interesting and mythical process which works as a transition from the gore of Gorgo to the green of Birnam Wood."<sup>18</sup> Two issues then must be explored: Macbeth's power and his sexual ambiguity.

Banquo first links gender with power and the occult in I.iii, when he asks the Sisters if they are "aught / That man may question".<sup>19</sup> Though it could be said that he means "man" only in the sense of "humankind," in a play so fraught with the dilemmas of manliness and womanliness it is wrong thus to de-value the term. In the witches' presence, Banquo immediately sets up a he/she dialectic, placing himself and (ironically) Macbeth on the male side whilst questioning whether or not the Sisters are as female as they "should be."

The Weïrd Sisters' sexual ambiguity is a uniquely Shakespearean device, which further underlines its importance. In the sources for the play, Buchanan

<sup>16</sup>Robert H. West, Reginald Scot and Renaissance Writings on Witchcraft (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 111.

<sup>17</sup>Marjorie Garber, "Macbeth: The Male Medusa," Shakespeare's Late Tragedies, ed. Susanne L. Wofford (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice, 1996) 86-87.

<sup>18</sup>Laroque 67.

<sup>19</sup>I.iii.43.

describes them as "three women . . . of more than human stature."<sup>20</sup> Holinshed expresses doubts about their nature, but never their sex:

there met them [Macbeth and Banquo] three women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of elder world, whome when they attentiuely beheld, the first of them spake. . . afterwards the common opinion was that these women were either the weird sisters, that is. . . the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs, or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromanticall science. . .<sup>21</sup>

Briggs' interpretation of this passage is that "Holinshed, drawing upon Hector Boethius, makes them Norns or Sibylls, three fairy women of unearthly beauty," and also notes that Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy, classifies the Weïrd Sisters as water-spirits.<sup>22</sup>

The Sisters, like the Renaissance Circe, act as a catalyst for the unleashing of Macbeth's power. This in turn turns him into a beast or monster, as the ordered world perceives him. Deborah Willis, as evidenced by her use of "seem" in the following excerpt, agrees with the status of Weïrd Sister as catalyst and observes that "by making their words seem to exert a controlling power over the speech of others and representing their utterances as 'solicitors' of Macbeth's desire, the play constructs a female origin for male desire."<sup>23</sup> The desire that is birthed in I.iii in both Macbeth and Banquo is one which Macbeth has nurtured within himself for some time.

Those who argue that Banquo neither believes nor is affected by the witches ignore the blatant evidence to the contrary in I.iii and II.i. Banquo is no less affected than Macbeth. When confronted with the Weïrd Sisters, he demands his fortune, as one "who neither beg[s], nor fear[s], / Your favours nor your hate."<sup>24</sup> Though he does

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<sup>20</sup>Macbeth 182.

<sup>21</sup>Macbeth 171-72.

<sup>22</sup>Briggs 78, 51. Incidentally, this belief explains Banquo's comment in I.iii.79-80: "The earth hath bubbles, as the water has, / And these are of them."

<sup>23</sup>Deborah Willis, Malevolent Nurture (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 217.

<sup>24</sup>I.iii.60-61.



fear the Sisters are of the Devil, or instruments of darkness (107, 124), still they make him fret and think. Macbeth calls for time to consider the wonder they have seen and heard, and speak of it later, a request to which Banquo accedes "[v]ery gladly" (156). The first scene of the second act opens with Banquo's being haunted by the Sisters and their words. "Merciful Powers!" he cries, "Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose!"<sup>25</sup> Later, he makes it clear that he dreams of the witches.<sup>26</sup> Like Macbeth's, Banquo's dreams are of ambition. Interestingly, when he prays (which, unlike Macbeth, he can still do, and which argues for a higher morality for Banquo at this point in time), he does not do so on the cross. In fact, he specifically gives Fleance his sword beforehand, and does not take it back till he hears what he thinks is an enemy approach. Banquo opens Act III in similar wise. Despite the fact that he fears Macbeth has murdered Duncan, he no longer couches the Weïrd Sisters and their prophecies in negative terms. Instead, he asks, "May they not . . . set me up in hope?"<sup>27</sup> More slowly than Macbeth, but just as surely, he begins to leave the straight and narrow.

In light of the ambiguity in which the Weïrd Sisters, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and Macduff are portrayed, Banquo is an interesting character. He is natural, upright and manly. Unlike the unnatural parent Macduff, he keeps his offspring with him. Fleance escapes to found the line which will eventually produce James VI and I. Unlike Macbeth, who is "rapt" at the Sisters' attentions, he maintains his reason and petitions them proudly, not letting fear or fascination gain the upper hand. He worries about his dreams to the extent that he hedges his actions with Macbeth, fearing to be pushed too far into the world of dreams: from discussing the matter "very gladly," he proceeds to the statement, "So I lose none [honour] / In seeking to augment it, but still

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<sup>25</sup>II.i.7-9.

<sup>26</sup>II.i.20.

<sup>27</sup>III.i.8-9.

keep / My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear, / I shall be counsell'd."<sup>28</sup> His ambition wars with his honour. The fact that his hope that the Weird Sisters will aid him implies that his honour is losing the battle. This doubt is echoed in Macbeth's evaluation. If he were as truly honourable as some would have it, there would be no reason for the doubt in Macbeth's couplet, "Banquo, thy soul's flight / If it find Heaven, must find it out tonight."<sup>29</sup>

Along with his slow corruption, Banquo is doomed by his isolation from the realm of women. Though Banquo is a just father, he is an isolated one. There is no Lady Banquo. Hence, though he does not reject any vestige of woman or of (sexual) desire which might serve to make him whole, he does not have access to it. He preserves a strict gender role and fails, as does anyone who does so in the play.

Macbeth is no stranger to desire, especially if it be "of female origin," as his relationship with and love for his wife demonstrate. Nosworthy compares Macbeth with Faustus and notes "Macbeth is likewise possessed and enkindled to a crime which is alien to his heroically virtuous character--a character to which the Bleeding Captain, Duncan, and Lady Macbeth all attest..."<sup>30</sup> However, classically speaking, characters of heroic virtue possess tragic flaws which prove their downfall; and, as Anthony Harris observes, the influence of various classical sources (especially Seneca) in Macbeth "has long been recognised."<sup>31</sup> Desire and ambition are Macbeth's twin flaws, and the future with which the Sisters tease him is one for which he will be the midwife, as they have delivered his hidden dreams.

Yet though they predict the future, they do not enforce their predictions. Their interferences dwell on different levels which are still, as Garber notes, sexual: "The transgressive and usurping androgynous power of the witches seems to justify, indeed

<sup>28</sup>II.i.26-29.

<sup>29</sup>III.i.140-41, emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup>Nosworthy 209.

<sup>31</sup>Anthony Harris, Night's Black Agents (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980) 36.



to invite, a reading of these lines [I.iii, etc.] as sexually invasive and demeaning; the drained husband will not, unlike the weird sisters, be capable of 'doing.'"<sup>32</sup>

"Usurping" here is inaccurate, for they demonstrate no other person's (or being's) power, though their rituals are an amalgam of magical practices. Willis states that, in general, stage witches "are also influenced by the conjurer's or necromancer's tradition; while associated with cursing and the use of familiars, they also perform incantations and arcane rites."<sup>33</sup>

The Weïrd Sisters transgress the boundaries between the elements (air, water, earth), and between male and female, real and unreal, here and there (Macbeth and Banquo know not exactly where they are when they encounter them, as evidenced by Banquo's query "How far is't called to Forres?"), natural and supernatural. The only power they could be said to usurp is Macbeth's, which once again returns us to regarding Macbeth as a witch.

Hecate admits Macbeth to the sisterhood at the same time as she castigates the Weïrd Sisters for going to the trouble of recruiting him: "And, which is worse, all you have done / Hath been but for a wayward son, / Spiteful and wrathful. . . ."<sup>34</sup> This suggests that the battle which is "lost and won" in I.i is not only the literal battle taking place (which Macbeth wins) and title which Duncan states Cawdor has lost and Macbeth has won at I.ii.69, but also the metaphysical battle against desire and ambition which Macbeth loses, and loses not in the world of nightmare, but "ere the set of sun." The witches only appear when Macbeth has subconsciously decided upon a course of action--witness his guilty "start" in I.iii.51. As Kenneth Muir argues, "He knows that the first step along the primrose path was taken on his own

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<sup>32</sup>Garber 95.

<sup>33</sup>Willis 160. She draws the former views from "low" literature, which she ascribes to accounts of village witches; the latter from "high" literature, such as those written for Elizabeth I and James I. Shakespeare is of a "middling sort" and his views therefore muddled. 16ff.

<sup>34</sup>III.v.10-12. Though it could be argued that this refers to Fleance, it is much more likely to mean Macbeth.

responsibility."<sup>35</sup> Macbeth himself acknowledges the Sisters' neutrality, or perhaps super-morality, when he states "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good."<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the play Macbeth demonstrates occult aptitude, often in problematic or downright odd circumstances. In I.iii, though Banquo addresses them first (and instantly wastes his traditional three questions), the Weïrd Sisters respond to Macbeth's injunction. His is the vision which can see the manifestations of dagger, ghost, and procession. He is unable to pray in II.ii--witches are, in contemporary belief, unable to do so.<sup>37</sup> In III.iv, Macbeth himself conjures the ghost of Banquo, though it is likely that Banquo's ghost is actually a shape-shifted familiar, just as the "maiden" who lures Cuddy into the bog in The Witch of Edmonton is Tom in disguise. The ghost of Banquo enters when Macbeth states, "Here had we now our country's honour roof'd, / Were the grac'd person of our Banquo present."<sup>38</sup> It leaves at the command "back" in line 71, and re-enters obediently (and with a certain amount of grim humour, one suspects) at Macbeth's wish for Banquo's presence in line 89. If one reads lines 92-106 as a continuous monologue interrupted by Lady Macbeth's aside to the assembled company, Banquo's ghost finally disappears at the end of what reads as a desperate but nonetheless semi-formal adjuration. Likewise, he presides over a banquet which fragments and splinters just as the Sisters preside over their cauldron of dismemberment. The meal in III.iv degenerates from a whole, coherent feast to a mockery of one--Lady Macbeth chastises her husband, "You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admir'd disorder."<sup>39</sup> Disorder becomes

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<sup>35</sup>Macbeth Ivi.

<sup>36</sup>I.iii.130-31.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Briggs 252. She also cites Bishop Bridgeman's report on the Lancashire witches, where one villager "is persuaded that Wilkinson and his wife are not witches, because he daily prays and reads and seems a godly man" (255).

<sup>38</sup>III.iv.39-40.

<sup>39</sup>III.iv.109-10.



the order of the night; it is no accident that the next scene is between the Weïrd Sisters and Hecate.

Susanne Wofford parallels Macbeth with the Sisters when she argues, "The witches too are traitors of a sort: they are marginalised, uncanny figures whose dependence on dismemberment, especially of the weak, the excluded, or the socially marginal, seems symbolically appropriate. Each example of a body part in this famous cauldron speech points to a double kind of fragmentation."<sup>40</sup> What Wofford fails to observe is that the witches themselves are marginalised, as all witches are, and thus in her metaphor the witches themselves depend on their social marginality. The fragmentation over which they preside foreshadows the disintegration, the uncoupling, of Macbeth and his wife. Karen Newman writes of "a rhetorical disciplining of the body by fragmenting it. . . .Anatomization was a strategy for managing femininity and controlling its uses."<sup>41</sup> With regard to Macbeth, this fragmentation starts by separating man from wife, then proceeds by turning the strong Lady Macbeth into a weak wifely stereotype. The play disciplines her to such an extent that the woman who could rally her husband and salvage both the murder and the debacle in III.iv can no longer control her speech, and rambles disjointedly whilst sleepwalking.

Although he has no knowledge of the Weïrd Sisters in I.iii, by the third act Macbeth is so much one of their number that he can traipse between the realms himself and find them wherever they be (be it the heath or the "pit of Acheron" of III.v.15). When he states "I will to-morrow / (And betimes I will) to the Weïrd Sisters: / More shall they speak," he shows that he can as it were slip between time ("tomorrow" and "betimes") and place. Marienstras notes that just as the witches' potion and feast are outside time, so too "Macbeth's power is abstracted from time."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Wofford 4.

<sup>41</sup>Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 10.

He also observes that "when Macbeth vainly seeks aid from his doctor, his behaviour sets up in the memory of the spectator a confused echo of the behaviour of the first witch."<sup>43</sup> In the third act, Macbeth uses the absolute "shall" in "More shall they speak," allowing for no possibility of denial. Moreover, when he encounters them in IV.i, he has the power to command the Sisters. When he says "I conjure you...answer me," and furthermore commands "...answer me / To what I ask you," they respond "Speak. / Demand. / We'll answer," showing how far Macbeth has progressed in his power.<sup>44</sup> When he thus questions them in I.iii, they vanish.<sup>45</sup> In IV.i as well, Macbeth seems quite at home in the uncanny surroundings, even managing a flippant response to the second apparition (IV.i.78). In Act V, Macbeth cries, "They have tied me to a stake : I cannot fly . . ." which is a highly charged metaphor in a witchcraft play.<sup>46</sup> The next line, "But, bear-like, I must fight the course," not only adds a sense of futility and enclosure, but also relocates the female sentiment of the first line to the martial male aspect of the second, preserving duality even at the end.

When his ambition leads him to question too far, then Macbeth descends into a lower form of witchery, but a no less potent one. As Appendix B demonstrates, it is also a form gendered specifically female. At IV.i.104-05 he cries "deny me this, / And an eternal curse fall on you!" The threat of his curse holds power, for the Sisters--perhaps unwillingly, for they caution him not to seek what will disturb him, or perhaps vengefully, depending on whether the line "Show his eyes, and grieve his heart" is read sympathetically or as a response to coercion--accede to his demand.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Marienstras 86.

<sup>43</sup>Marienstras 83.

<sup>44</sup>IV.i.60-61.

<sup>45</sup>This could, however, be because Macbeth asks four questions instead of three--the first in I.iii.47, and another three between 70 and 78. In IV.i his questions to the witches' "masters" remain unvoiced, though the three apparitions suggest three questions. Macbeth has learned the ground rules, though even that does not stop him from pressing the witches with further questions. Once again his ambition overrules him.

<sup>46</sup>V.vii.1.



When they leave, Macbeth begins to curse. He curses time in IV.i.133, and the air and himself (but notably not the Sisters) in 138-39. This ironic self-condemnation appears again in V.iii, where Macbeth, resigned to his fate, determines to play it out with occult "harness" on. He opines,

And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but in their stead,  
Curses not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.  
Seyton!<sup>48</sup>

Curses are the domain of the village witch and also, as I have demonstrated with regard to the Henry VI tetralogy, of the transgressive or liminal. It can be no accident that "Seyton" is a homonym of "Satan." Nosworthy notes that although few of the other characters are ever called out to by proper name at all, Seyton is effectively invoked four times in fairly quick succession.<sup>49</sup> He also observes,

"Shakespeare . . . transformed Seyton into a dual-purpose figure who, like the Porter, goes about his modest task at one level but brings with him blasts from hell at the other."<sup>50</sup> By his underscoring of the summoning of Seyton, and by his belief that "It is with Duncan's blood that the compact with Macbeth and Satan is signed,"

Nosworthy would seem to support the notion of diabolic witchery and Macbeth's participation therein. However, he, along with Marienstras, is reluctant to condemn Macbeth totally: as stated above, Nosworthy believes that Macbeth is "possessed and enkindled to a crime which is alien to his heroically virtuous character."<sup>51</sup> Someone who is possessed is a victim, not a perpetrator. Marienstras argues that the witches serve not only as patrons of disorder, but as displacements for Macbeth's evil: "the

<sup>47</sup>IV.i.104-11.

<sup>48</sup>V.iii.24-29.

<sup>49</sup>Nosworthy 217.

<sup>50</sup>Nosworthy 217.

<sup>51</sup>Nosworthy 209.

presence of the witches partly exonerates Macbeth to the extent that the real evil appears to be located outside him. . . .It is always Macbeth who acts - freely - but at the same time it is always the witches who are acting through him."<sup>52</sup>

The very fact that critics attempt to exonerate Macbeth in the very act of condemning him argues both for the terror which lies behind the idea of a witch, especially a male witch, and for the seductiveness of his (or her) character.<sup>53</sup> As has been discussed previously, the unruly woman or the transvestite presents intriguing or safe outlets for desire and disorder; these outlets are missing here, presenting readers and audience with untamed disorder and unruly desire. Linda Bamber notes that this lack, which she sees as a lack of border between Self and Other, produces unheimlich sensations: "In Macbeth . . . there is no actual Other but only our projections of otherness. The outside world is nightmarishly repetitive of the inner world. . . .Not only are the women projections of what is unacceptable in the male Self . . . but the external social world lacks the alternatives that elsewhere challenge the world of men."<sup>54</sup> Nightmares, women, and men interweave in a horrific, claustrophobic setting. Though Bamber is correct to note the struggle between (and for) Self and Other, her theory is more usefully carried out by saying that women present aspects of Self which should be accepted and integrated.

K. Tetzeli von Rosador discusses what amounts to the seduction of imagination in both Macbeth and Doctor Faustus. According to contemporary philosophers, the imagination could work either for good or bad, order or disorder. He includes William Perkins amongst the Calvinists who believed the latter (though, interestingly, he does not acknowledge Perkins as a witch-hunter) and states, "It is because of this dual potential that the imagination of fantasy is invariably considered

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<sup>52</sup>Marienstras 82.

<sup>53</sup>"Witch" is used intentionally in this instance; "magus" or "philosopher" does not connote the uncanniness or the horror that Macbeth evokes. Prospero pales into saintly whiteness next to the blood and darkness of Macbeth.

<sup>54</sup>Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1982) 19.



to be the proper and main point of attack or gateway for the temptations of either devil or witch."<sup>55</sup> Though von Rosador does not discuss the sexual potential of this situation, his words echo its inherent seductiveness: "If Mephistopheles and the witches are to tempt Faustus and Macbeth they must somehow creep into their minds and souls to work mischief there, they must distort their victim's perceptions."<sup>56</sup> If this is a description of possession (again exempting Macbeth from primary agency), it is also strongly reminiscent of Catullan and Sapphic descriptions of love.<sup>57</sup>

The rest of the occult potential, and indeed incidents, in the play lies in the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. And if critics tend to transfer Macbeth's evil onto the witches, then even more strongly are they willing to exonerate Macbeth at the expense of his wife, though even on that quarter opinion is divided about whether or not she is a diabolic witch or just an ambitious and (therefore?) evil woman, a virago, a social witch. For example, despite the fact that Marienstras notes the primary agency of both husband and wife in the play (the "disorders unleashed by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth under the patronage of the witches"), and describes Lady Macbeth as a catalyst who encourages her husband "to a course of action that he had already imagined," he also displaces Macbeth's evil onto her, as evidenced by his statement, "Sometimes Shakespeare uses intermediaries posted at intervals throughout the play; thus, before Macbeth is convinced, Lady Macbeth goes altogether over to the side of the witches (I.v.38-54)."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, von Rosador alleges that Lady Macbeth turns herself into a witch: "Thus evil must attack again and it does so by repeating the [temptation] process. It is Lady Macbeth who now takes over the Weird Sisters' function, for which she has prepared herself by invoking evil . . . and by becoming

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<sup>55</sup>K. Tetzeli von Rosador, "Supernatural soliciting: temptation and imagination in Doctor Faustus and Macbeth," Shakespeare and his Contemporaries, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986) 45.

<sup>56</sup>von Rosador 44.

<sup>57</sup>See poem 51 of Catullus, which is based upon one of Sappho's poems.

<sup>58</sup>Marienstras 73, 74, 82.

virtually possessed."<sup>59</sup> However, again, if Lady Macbeth is possessed, she is a victim, not an aggressor, and, harking back to Harsnett, who discovered the cozenage at Denham, very probably being manipulated. The only person who can possibly manipulate Lady Macbeth is her husband.

Harris believes that,

it is also possible to see in the sleep-walking episode (V.i.) evidence that she is possessed by the demon Nightmare. This malign spirit was traditionally thought to oppress men in their sleep and it has affinities with Queen Mab. . .As with his treatment of the Weird Sisters, Shakespeare seems to be deliberately inexplicit in his treatment of Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking but the Doctor's conclusion that "More needs she the divine than the physician" (V.i.72) clearly implies the need for exorcism of evil spirits.<sup>60</sup>

Yet even Harris comes down firmly on both sides of the fence, for he also claims Lady Macbeth is a classical witch, parallel to Medea and compared to that ultimately disobedient woman, Clytemnestra, and asks,

Is Lady Macbeth in fact. . .so determined to overcome the weakness of her own "milk of human kindness" that she is here [I.v] attempting to transform herself into such a spirit? Macbeth knowingly puts his soul at risk in order to achieve his aim and at this stage of the play Lady Macbeth's drive for power is even greater than her husband's. Malcolm's final verdict on her as a "fiend-like queen" might be even more appropriate than he realises.<sup>61</sup>

At least he realises that Lady Macbeth does have the "milk of human kindness." Many do not, and fail to realise that one does not invoke something which one already owns in abundance. If Lady Macbeth were the epitome of an evil shrew, she would have no need to ask to be filled with "direst cruelty"; had she no remorse, she would not need to "Stop up th'access and passage" thereto.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>von Rosador 48.

<sup>60</sup>Harris 53.

<sup>61</sup>Harris 36, 52.

<sup>62</sup>I.v.43-44. Lady Macbeth in her sleepwalking scene parallels the Duchess of Gloucester in 2H6; the Doctor records her words as Bolingbroke records the Spirit's.



Though their marital relationship is seen mostly through Macbeth's eyes, there can be no doubt that it is a caring one. Macbeth calls his wife "My dearest partner of greatness" at I.v.11 and "my dearest love" at line 58; in III.ii. he refers to her as "dearest chuck" at line 45. The "we" in II.i.32 may be a slip to the royal we, but it may also be including Lady Macbeth in his council. As Banquo does not notice the pronoun, it is likely that Lady Macbeth is often included in Macbeth's councils. Duncan accounts Macbeth's swift journey to the fact that "he rides well; / And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him / To his home before us."<sup>63</sup> Though some might say this could refer to Macbeth's supposed love for Duncan, it is much more likely, both in light of the fact that his love helps him home and of Malcolm's reference to wife and child as "those precious motives, those strong knots of love," that overabiding love for Lady Macbeth drives him on.

Linguistic and dramatic evidence in the text also support this. Macbeth opines in I.vii.25-26 that "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent," an assertion which specifically recalls "his great love, sharp as his spur." This scene also evinces some instance of conjuration. As Macbeth summons Banquo in the feast scene, so too here does he summon his wife. After bemoaning the lack of his "spur," he claims he has only "Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th'other--" at which point Lady Macbeth enters. This can be seen as an instance of invoking Bamber's Other. But Lady Macbeth also serves almost as a familiar, who maintains her husband's spirits and resolution, spurring him on more firmly than Tom does Mother Sawyer in The Witch of Edmonton. Harking back to the argument that the possessed are manipulated, one sees Macbeth is in control of his wife at this moment, and in fact for the rest of the play.

In thrice giving actual voice to the imaginary voice which cries "Sleep no more" in II.ii, Macbeth actualises a spell. Three is always an occultly powerful number, and occurs throughout the (three) Weïrd Sisters' scenes. Nosworthy, though

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<sup>63</sup>I.vi.22-24.

he imputes purely satanic roots to the triads, observes that they "attach to Macbeth, the Porter, and the murderers; to Hecate, the witches, and the apparitions, but never to the guiltless, such as Banquo, Malcolm, or Macduff."<sup>64</sup> When Macbeth cries "Macbeth shall sleep no more," he damns himself to a world of eternal twilight, the liminal world between waking and sleep--but he damns as well his "dearest partner of greatness," his other self, Lady Macbeth. Whilst he is present, he can carry the burden for both of them, but it is infinitely telling that Lady Macbeth also sleep-walks (on every third night, it would appear) only "Since his Majesty went into the field."<sup>65</sup> When the two are apart, they cannot function. Macbeth's choppiness of speech in "the field" in V.iii.47-56 recalls his wife's two scenes earlier. This fragmentation of speech further underlines the disintegration of each party. As self-definition changes and breaks down, so does the language which expresses it. Elizabeth Harvey observes, "[V]oice, especially the hushed voice of gossip, spies, and secrecy, emerges from the disjunction between the face and the masks it wears, and it is in these whispering rooms that the notion of an essential self and its linkage to language is problematized."<sup>66</sup> The hushed voices of secrecy dominate Lady Macbeth, emphasising her disjointedness; Macbeth's sense of self is jeopardised even in waking. His apparent careless notice of his wife's death at V.v.17 is made horrific by the rejection of his most "precious motive." Conversely, it proves that when he is apart from his wife, Macbeth is no longer the noble Macbeth, but treacherous Cawdor. Malcolm describes the original Cawdor in I.iv.8-11 thus: "he died / As one that had been studied in his death, / To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd / As 'twere a careless trifle." This circular construction is not careless: Macbeth is Cawdor, and he has used, wasted, and discarded his "dearest thing," in his case his wife.

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<sup>64</sup>Nosworthy 221.

<sup>65</sup>V.i.4.

<sup>66</sup>Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices* (1992; London: Routledge, 1995) 2.



That Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's most "precious motive" is also obvious. Though the initial concept, the original imagination, is his, the encouragement, at least at the onset, is hers. She asks him to kill Duncan, and he does. Her accusations of lack of love and desire in I.vii are answered by him in II.iii. When asked by Malcolm why he killed the grooms, Macbeth replies, seemingly to him, but in reality to his wife: "Who could refrain / That had a heart to love, and in that heart / Courage, to make's love known?"<sup>67</sup> As Margaret is distressed at Gloucester's death to discover how much her complicity has disturbed Henry, and as she swoons at Edward's death because Edward's death is a direct result of his maternal parentage, so Lady Macbeth swoons to discover that, when pressed, Macbeth is capable of killing for her, and does so. Closely knit before, they are now bound in a tie more "indissoluble" than that which binds Banquo to Macbeth (and which would seem to be, lacking any other evidence, complicity in the Sisters' prophecy). When Macbeth leaves Lady Macbeth behind, he loses the better part of himself and dooms himself to failure, for, as even Angus notices in V.ii.19-20, "Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love." Together, "Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are in touch with themselves, each other, and the world. They transgress their limitations and pay for it in division and death."<sup>68</sup> Once ruptured, their unity cannot be repaired. Macbeth, throughout, is concerned numerologically not only with triads, but with dyads as well. When the dyad is disrupted, so is its potency; each half is impotent on its own.

The intertwining of Lady Macbeth and her husband is inextricably bound with gender "transgressions." Macbeth, by aligning himself in whatever fashion with the witches, also takes on their liminal state, as has been stated. He also appropriates their sexual ambiguity, as, necessarily, does his wife. The most obvious and oft-cited speech of Lady Macbeth's, which underlines her sexual ambiguity, is that in I.v.40-41: "Come, you Spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here." Whether or not

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<sup>67</sup>II.iii.114-16.

<sup>68</sup>Lachlan Mackinnon, Shakespeare the Aesthete (London: Macmillan, 1988) 74.

her invocation is answered, and to what extent, influences the degree to which she can be seen as either sexual or gendered. Nosworthy claims that "her impassioned pleas...receive no answer"; Young argues that unlike King Lear, where the wish and the hortative are sterile, in Macbeth "Language and experience keep closing. Prayers are answered, invocations are successful, determination expressed in thought and language move all too smoothly into deed and actuality."<sup>69</sup> Young's tenet should be moderated: as long as language and experience are whole, thought and language are realised. Disjuncture of either renders closure problematic.

There is no evidence that Lady Macbeth's invocation summons a supernatural entity of the level of the witches' apparitions or Macbeth's conjuration of the Sisters and Banquo. Nosworthy claims that Lady Macbeth "does not interest the powers of darkness. . .The Devil's purpose, in this play, is to corrupt the virtuous. He has neither time nor tricks to spare for someone who is very well able to proceed to hell under her own momentum."<sup>70</sup> More neutrally, Willis relates,

[W]hereas the witches have uncanny magical powers. . .Lady Macbeth, even after her conjuration speech, seems decidedly down to earth. They foretell the future; Lady Macbeth's vision has a shorter range. Their ambiguous language infects the play as a whole and is open-ended enough to sustain multiple interpretations; Lady Macbeth limits and localizes their meanings.<sup>71</sup>

She does not step into the Sisters' place; she retains her own.

This does not mean that she has no grounds for being considered a witch; rather, it signifies that her powers are more social than occult, a fact which is underlined by Laroque's comment that "the evil imagery of her famous soliloquy in I.5. . .turns her into a verbal fury and a witch."<sup>72</sup> As with other characters, verbal

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<sup>69</sup>Nosworthy 212; Young 100. Briggs counters Young with "Black witchcraft is the magic of sterility" (80), and reconciling the two implies that the Macbeths' immediate goals are achieved, but that their long-term achievement is barren.

<sup>70</sup>Nosworthy 212. The Devil is absent in Macbeth's dealings, except for the Seyton/Satan switch at the end. The Weïrd Sisters serve unnamed masters, but they are likely to be Hecate and her ilk.

<sup>71</sup>Willis 222.



potency and witchcraft are linked. As has been noted, Lady Macbeth has been found to have links with Medea; Laroque also finds Circean resonances in her behaviour: "[Circe] is metaphorically hinted at in the wine and wassail with which Lady Macbeth plans to drug Duncan's chamberlains."<sup>73</sup> Certainly, enough references are made to drunken merriment in the time surrounding Duncan's death to warrant the observation that the men under the influence of drink have degenerated to bestial level; this, however, would turn Macbeth into an Odysseus figure, for he alone retains his sobriety. Whilst it could be argued that his acts are bestial, it must be noted that if they are so, then Lady Macbeth, like the Sisters, merely catalyses a reaction for which the reagents were already present. This fits with Renaissance Circean imagery.

The most telling argument for classifying Lady Macbeth as an occult witch as opposed to one whose powers are social comes in I.v. As her sleepwalking disintegration foreshadows her husband's fragmentation two scenes later in the fifth act, so in the first act does she summon her husband as he conjures her two scenes later. For the answer to Lady Macbeth's plea to the "Spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts," the "murth'ring ministers," and "thick Night" is Macbeth's entrance. He answers the more dire of the two summonses; she answers the more profane. Together they are each other's familiars or demons.

Her social powers and confidence wane as his wax; however, in the beginning she is mentally stronger (possibly evidenced by the fact that she can call upon him). Mackinnon alleges, "She is more of a man than he is. Lady Macbeth shifts the grounds of argument from homeliness to sexuality."<sup>74</sup> Mackinnon also attempts to argue that Lady Macbeth is all masculine drive, and Macbeth none, but despite persuasive wording, ambiguity creeps into the discussion:

This shedding of sexuality [unsex me here] is part of a web of imagery surrounding Duncan's murder. Macbeth means to do the deed like a

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<sup>72</sup>Laroque 62.

<sup>73</sup>Laroque 62.

<sup>74</sup>Mackinnon 67.

rapist . . . another displacement of the kind he recognises in his wife when telling her to have male children only. . . .She has disowned all femininity, and becomes brutal masculine energy. . . .[However] Lady Macbeth . . . is unable actually to commit the murder. Drink and drugs stimulate a libidinous drive which cannot be fulfilled, and that Lady Macbeth's explanation depends on Duncan's resemblance to her father (II.ii.12-13) shows how joined are criminal and sexual prohibitions in her mind. Her fear is that murder is a kind of incest, for murder is in this play a sublimation of eroticism.<sup>75</sup>

This last claim supports the theorem that Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's ultimate reason for killing Duncan.

However, several pages later one finds Mackinnon guilty of self-contradiction, claiming that Lady Macbeth,

for all her bravado . . . knows less what it [the murder] means. She brushes aside Duncan's likeness to her father without pausing to consider its implications, where Macbeth knows he is acting like a rapist [see reference to Tarquin at II.i.55]. Lady Macbeth takes on her husband's weakness and collapses . . . she believed that the body could be disowned; he knew that he could never escape from a relation to it.<sup>76</sup>

Considering her exhortations in I.vii.37-42, which are explicitly sexual, this is unlikely.

Expanding Mackinnon's statement that murder is a "sublimation of eroticism," what Lady Macbeth realises is that all violence is inherently sexual. Furthering Mackinnon's claim that Lady Macbeth "shifts the grounds of argument from homeliness to sexuality," what Macbeth and Lady Macbeth accomplish by murdering a guest is transporting their home to the realm of the unheimlich. Any sex (as a construct) or sexuality expressed in their home therefore becomes liminal and problematic.

"And wakes it [hope] now," asks Lady Macbeth in I.vii,

to look so green and pale  
At what it did so freely? From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard

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<sup>75</sup>Mackinnon 66.

<sup>76</sup>Mackinnon 72-73.



To be the same in thine own act and valour,  
 As thou art in desire? . . .  
 When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
 And to be more than what you were, you would  
 Be so much more the man.<sup>77</sup>

Lady Macbeth taunts her husband--his love is unmanly, womanly; it is "green and pale," like a maiden with the green sickness. She grounds action firmly in desire, and states explicitly that cowards, people who accept limitations and do not "dare do more," have no claim to manliness. She dares, and therefore Duncan's murder becomes a joint action: "we'll not fail" (I.vii.62). In so daring she makes up for her husband's womanly conduct with her own manly strength.

Similarly, in the banquet scene, she taunts Macbeth with womanliness. "Are you a man?" she chides; "these flaws and starts / ...would well become / A woman's story at a winter's fire, / Authoris'd by her grandam."<sup>78</sup> Later still, she accuses him of being "quite unmann'd in folly."<sup>79</sup> Though Macbeth claims he is a bold man (58), and that he dares do what any man would, in echo of I.vii (98), still he admits that it is only when the ghost is gone that "I am a man again" (107). Garber believes that "Lady Macbeth's scathing reference to female storytelling, womanish narrative, and female authority and lineage neatly encapsulates all his [Macbeth's] fears, providing a devastating alternative to the bold male historical chronicle in which he would like to act."<sup>80</sup> Ironically, though Lady Macbeth denigrates women's storytelling, she proceeds to tell a tale to the lords in order to explain her husband's oddness. At the same time as she indulges in this womanish pastime, she presides over the mundane feast as Macbeth presides over the occult one.

When Macbeth parts from his Lady, offstage before the fifth act, the male-female continuum in which each participated on either side disintegrates, and renders

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<sup>77</sup>37-51.

<sup>78</sup>III.iv.57, 62-65.

<sup>79</sup>III.iv.72.

<sup>80</sup>Garber 93-94.

each of them less than he or she was at the beginning of the play. Lady Macbeth falls prey to nightmare and hysteria, and becomes weak enough to seek suicide, she who once boldly proclaimed "we'll not fail." Stallybrass places the changes in Lady Macbeth into a sphere of sexual politics. He argues, "[T]he transformation of Lady Macbeth is used to affirm developmentally the antithetical structure. It operates as a specific closure of discourse within the binary opposition of virago (witch)/wife."<sup>81</sup> If he intends this dialectic to operate solely within Lady Macbeth, Stallybrass' argument fails, for witch does not compete with wife in Lady Macbeth. If, however, the binary opposition sets Lady Macbeth against Lady Macduff, or as a mundane complement to the catalytic Weird Sisters, then it holds. Whether or not one accepts that Macbeth spoke her sentence in II.ii, Lady Macbeth certainly comes to signify all that is weak in a woman, and kills herself in her bedroom. Even at her end, violence and sex--represented here by the marital bedroom--are linked. Similarly, her physical demise parallels her verbal one. Whereas, at the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth is sexually powerful and in control verbally, at the end her fragmented speech argues, in light of the link between speech and sexuality, that her sexuality has been conquered and controlled as well. Hence, when Lisa Jardine states, "Off stage, the male member of the audience recognises the representation of perennially threatening woman (perennial source of horror) . . . and recognises equally its absurd excessiveness. No woman of his will ever get thus out of hand, and hence the representation is equally a source of delight,"<sup>82</sup> delight can be found also in Lady Macbeth's demise. Her threat is distanced and contained by her downfall. However, this interpretation presumes a male or male-identified audience. For women watching the tragedy, this scene assumes at the least a monitory air, at the worst a horrific one. Macbeth, on the other hand, becomes all warrior, all male, all action. He chooses to die fighting, with his armour on.

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<sup>81</sup>Stallybrass 199.

<sup>82</sup>Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters (Sussex: Harvester, 1983) 97.



Macbeth is defeated, of course, by Macduff, he who was brought into the world by Caesarian section, killing his mother in her chamber as Lady Macbeth dies in hers. Throughout the play, the other couple who act as weak shadows to the Macbeths are the Macduffs. They also weakly echo the Macbeths' sexual ambiguity.

Lady Macduff typifies the "good wife" in Macbeth. She remains with her children, and remains calm in face of danger. She is not unintelligent, as evidenced by her conversation with her son, though the young boy does show more native wit than she. She evokes echoes of Elizabeth in Richard III, and in Stallybrass' terms would fall on the wife side of the virago/wife equation. Yet she is dismayed at the end by her soft womanliness, which allows her no recourse:

. . . Whither should I fly?  
 I have done no harm. But I remember now  
 I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm  
 Is often laudable; to do good, sometime  
 Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas!  
 Do I put up that womanly defense,  
 To say, I have done no harm?<sup>83</sup>

Being solely womanly in Macbeth dooms any character. Both Ladies die of it.

Macduff, unnatural because not born of woman, is also dubbed unnatural by his wife when she learns of his flight--a flight which is never fully explained in the play. She laments, "He loves us not: / He wants the natural touch."<sup>84</sup> Her lament solidifies the idea of naturalness first seen in 3 Henry 6. Margaret believes the York children hideous because of their want of finer feeling. Richard, in Richard III, who only counterfeits love, is also unnatural. Now Macduff joins their villainous number--which in and of itself does not bode well. In the next scene, Macduff immediately establishes himself as virile and manly, in contrast to Malcolm who wishes to go somewhere to weep. Macduff scoffs, "Let us rather / Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men / Bestride our downfall birthdom."<sup>85</sup> The imagery is

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<sup>83</sup>IV.ii.72-78.

<sup>84</sup>IV.ii.8-9.

clearly and violently sexual: armed with the sword/phallus, Macduff straddles the female "birthdom." Muir glosses this as "fatherland,"<sup>86</sup> but given the imagery and the fact that the reader, if not the audience, knows that Macduff has already ripped one womb (his mother's), the violence and deliberateness of "birthdom" is apparent. In addition, Macduff then goes on to paint such a lecherous picture of himself that his intent can be in no doubt. The tables turn at the end of the scene, when Malcolm must advise Macduff to take the news of his family's death "like a man."<sup>87</sup> Macduff realises that they were killed because of his (unnatural, cowardly, or womanly) flight, as his next speech shows. He claims, "I must also feel it as a man" (220), but is aware that his mourning would be a sign of weakness, playing "the woman with mine eyes" (230). However, the death of his womanly nature, which he dismisses ("Cut short all intermission" (232)), as the death of his wife, activates all that is manly in Macduff, as he goes into warrior mode to confront the similarly deprived warrior Macbeth.

Macduff, therefore, as he confronts Macbeth, resolves the sexual ambiguity of the play by being completely untainted by woman: of no woman born (and therefore never subjected to the kind of malevolent nurture Willis observes in Shakespeare's witches), and having no female counterpart. Yet he, paradoxically, is a type of Fury, a figure of vengeance, for it is only his family's death that spurs him on. As he says at V.vii.15-16, "If thou be'st slain, and with no stroke of mine, / My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still." The "still" implies that he has been haunted already, which presupposes his guilt at their deaths.

Macbeth, on the other hand, having lost his "precious motive," and soul-tired by blood and by the march of never-ending tomorrows, shows some quality of mercy and womanliness at the last, proving himself more natural than his opponent. He attempts to spare Macduff for his family's sake, only to be rebuffed by the words he

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<sup>85</sup>IV.iii.2-4.

<sup>86</sup>Macbeth 122.

<sup>87</sup>IV.iii.219.



shudders to hear, that Macduff "was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd."<sup>88</sup>

Macbeth's response is curious:

Accursed be the tongue that tells me so,  
For it hath cow'd my better part of man:  
And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,  
That palter with us in a double sense;  
That keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope.--I'll not fight with thee.<sup>89</sup>

Macduff daunts Macbeth's courage and thereby diminishes his potency, as Joan does Talbot in 1 Henry 6. Still liminal, this time wavering between life and death, Macbeth responds with a curse. But this, his last reflex curse, is merely that--a reflex. It carries no weight. It is the response of the victim, not the aggressor. Macduff has dampened Macbeth's ardour--desire, virility and violence being ever entwined in the play--and therefore Macbeth cries out Macduff as a witch's victim cries out against his (or her) oppressor. It is not unreasonable to expect that Macduff will gain, as a reward for killing Macbeth, the title Macbeth received for killing the previous traitor. Other indications also point to the cycle of evil beginning again. Macduff, like Macbeth, is now barren. Macduff also, by his participation in Birnam Wood's march on Dunsinane, now has claim on Macbeth's title as Wodewose or Green Man. He therefore subtly inherits at least part of Macbeth's position, and in this light it is interesting to note that Macduff's last lines, "Whose voices I desire aloud with mine,-- / Hail, King of Scotland" can be read two ways. On the surface his speech simply calls for all, including himself, to acclaim Malcolm king. On another level, however, readers must be alert to the watch-word "desire." It is the last active verb that Macduff uses, and he uses it in conjunction with the kingship. Malcolm is crowned king, and yet it is the line of Banquo, one remembers, that will rule. Shakespeare subtly leaves his audience wondering exactly how the line of descent will pass from Duncan's line to Banquo's.

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<sup>88</sup>V.viii.15-16.

<sup>89</sup>V.viii.17-22.

Macbeth's real parting curse is conditional: "damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'"<sup>90</sup> This curse remains open, for certainly Macbeth never cries the phrase. Nor does Macduff. This last remnant of the uncanny remains hovering above the world-stage and its players, ready to descend upon him who leaves his masculinity sufficiently aside to surrender, woman-like.

Also intriguing is the intermingling of singular and plural pronouns and possessives in Macbeth's above speech: "my," "us," "our," "our" and "I." Macbeth is by this time fragmented, but the variation in person is not just the faltering of a king or the downgrading from royal we to singular or familiar I. The plural in some sense must include the partner in his travails and counsels, Lady Macbeth, just as the hope linguistically recalls the hope she mentions in I.vii.

The last striking verbal image in the play is of the central couple, and specifically of Lady Macbeth. Malcolm speaks "Of this dead butcher, and his fiend-like Queen, / Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life."<sup>91</sup> Alongside this violent image, which implies Malcolm views Lady Macbeth, even in her last feminine weakness as having unnatural strength and desire, is the dismembered head of Macbeth, being borne with Macduff. If the Weïrd Sisters in their cauldron scene are attempting to create a whole from several parts, as Marienstras suggests, then at the end of the play we have the dismemberment from the cauldron metaphorically spilling over onto the stage with the images of the severed Macbeths.

However, the head of Macbeth which literally oversees the final scene does not possess the kind of uncanniness that Malcolm's evocation of Lady Macbeth carries, or that the "unnatural" Macduff's brutal sexual imagery and speech in the last few scenes carry. Wofford surmises that "One of the deeper terrors of Macbeth seems

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<sup>90</sup>V.viii.34.

<sup>91</sup>V.ix.35-37.



to be not, then, the dismemberment of the traitor in manly battle but the 'wrack' associated with the witches' uncanny control, and possibly, by extension, a man's mutilation at the hands not of a man but of a female or, perhaps even worse, a doubly gendered embodiment of fate."<sup>92</sup> The audience remembers at the end of Macbeth that the Weird Sisters hovered over just such a battlefield after the defeat of a traitor in I.i, where the next traitor lurked within the heart of the victorious, and this knowledge and lack of closure furthers the sense of unease. Though the play comes to an end, there is no sense of a "happily ever after," no bright sunrise, no cessation of darkness. There is only a brief pause in what one unhappily believes is a continuous cycle of doubling and disorder.

Lack of clarity leaves everyone, including audience and reader, in the shadow of witchcraft. Young observes that in Macbeth "the magic spreads in a way that does not allow us to understand precisely where it leaves off."<sup>93</sup> As the magic spreads, so too does the ambiguity embraced by magic's first practitioners in the play. In Macbeth Shakespeare manages effectively to blur distinctions, or at least to render them powerless. This process of doubling and disintegration of boundaries is helped along by the anonymity of the powers which frame the action: the Sisters are never given names, and the magic they practice is "a deed without a name."

"'A deed without a name,' as one of the witches calls their activity around the cauldron," believes Young, "is an action so closely tied to the meaning and function of language that the distinction between sign and referent is no longer useful or necessary. This is what magic means, and this is what Macbeth accomplishes in the

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<sup>92</sup>Wofford 5.

<sup>93</sup>Young 109.

theater."<sup>94</sup> Things without names are beyond control--magical praxeis are always concerned with naming specifically and thoroughly the beings they seek to control or influence. But it is again not just the Sisters who suffer from this lack of definition. Both the Macbeths and the Macduffs, unlike Duncan, Malcolm, Donalbain, and Banquo, are effectively unnamed. Their "proper" names are never spoken or voiced. Their powers therefore reign unchecked; they cannot be defined. Boundaries are not only transgressed but ignored. Genders blur and worlds merge. One comes away, not with impressions of strong individual characters, but with nebulous, inchoate dis-ease. Not only sign and referent, but appearance, reality, and belief are rendered useless. Ultimately, this is what grants Macbeth its haunting, magical, horrific quality, and what makes it a highly subversive text.

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<sup>94</sup>Young 129.



## CHAPTER 8. TOO HOT, TOO HOT! CONCLUDING WITH SHAKESPEARE

By now it is a commonplace to observe that Shakespeare refers to witchcraft in a great many of his plays, even if only in passing. These references are neither time-specific nor reign-dependent: the Henry VI tetralogy is early in Shakespeare's career; Macbeth quite late. Henry VI is Elizabethan; both Macbeth and The Tempest entirely Jacobean. It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to inspect the minutiae of every occult Shakespearean reference. This chapter analyses some of the plays not as strongly associated with witchcraft as the foregoing plays, though witchcraft or magic are present in all of them: The Tempest, The Comedy of Errors, Othello, and The Winter's Tale.

One thing that connects all four plays is that witchcraft is not consistently charged to any woman's account. None achieve the impact and effect that either Joan or Margaret does. This can be read as cause and effect—without the driving force of unruliness, be it occult or sexual (all women discussed in this chapter are reconciled to society either by marriage or death), the women in The Tempest, The Comedy of Errors, Othello, and The Winter's Tale ultimately fall prey to male-controlled action and power structures. One still finds, especially in Othello and The Winter's Tale, links between speech, sexuality, and threat, but the women manifesting them are contained, again, either by death (which allows their image to be purified and manipulated by the men who remain) or marriage. What follows then is an examination of the occult references in the plays, how they intertwine with the plots and characters, and how the women in the plays are silenced, removing them from any virago status they may have had the potential for.

### I. The Tempest

The Tempest revolves around Prospero as a hurricane around its eye. Prospero, however, does not interest this study. He is a Hermetic magus in the

tradition of Dee and Fludd, strictly and utterly patriarchal and ruthless in his extinction of female power.<sup>1</sup> Miranda is nothing but a pawn, and without any kind of female role-model whatsoever. Or, if she has a role-model, Sycorax is she, and Prospero could not devise a more negatively-presented exemplum. Sycorax is apparently a hag who easily could keep company with Duessa in her true form, or with Middleton's Hecate: foul, ugly, promiscuous, powerful, evil. Caliban and Ariel are her legacies, deformity and freedom imprisoned, respectively. Legacies, because long before the play even starts Prospero has safely defeated her and removed her from contention.

Sycorax is also African. As Alden and Virginia Vaughan note she "was an Algerian before her banishment to the island."<sup>2</sup> She is blacker than black--her own people exile her as too powerful and barbarous even for them. Hence she is the perfect example of the evil woman. As if her power and race were not enough, Prospero adds the crowning touch. She entered into diabolic pact and intercourse, producing Caliban. The Vaughans analyse this with regard to Caliban himself:

Several times Caliban's parentage - his mother, Prospero tells us, was an Algerian witch, his father the devil - is invoked . . . such lineage may imply a less-than-human shape, for unions with the devil, especially by a witch, often brought forth - according to conventional wisdom - all sorts of grotesque birth. . . .In light of other evidence in the text that Caliban is essentially human, the attribution of satanic parentage, if such it was, more likely testifies to Caliban's inherently warped character. And the progeny of a witch and the devil could have been human - again, according to conventional wisdom - in fundamental shape, though inwardly and outwardly deformed.<sup>3</sup>

Since Caliban is morally deformed, his parents were diabolic; since his parents were diabolic, Caliban is deformed. This equation works in either direction, and can be

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<sup>1</sup>Both the scope and the length of this study preclude the full exploration of the figure of the magus.

<sup>2</sup>Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, Shakespeare's Caliban (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 51. Sycorax invites the same debate about race as Othello does. The scope of this study does not include racial theory; however, the validity of that theory is undoubted. Whether her blue eyes signify a Berber or mixed race as well as pregnancy or not, Sycorax should not be perceived as white.

<sup>3</sup>Vaughan 15.



used to vilify either generation. Useful propaganda, especially in controlling Miranda who, it can be implied, will produce just such an offspring if she slips from the straight and narrow to the primrose path.

Caliban, as the Vaughans illustrate, has been often appropriated by various oppressed groups. Similarly, Prospero as time marches on has come to be seen as not quite the benevolent, wise patriarch he both presents himself to be and was apparently believed to be. R.S. White notes, for example, "no matter how deficient in decorous civility or willed repression Caliban may be, no matter how full of curses and anger, he has positive attributes which Prospero lacks. He has feelings of true generosity, a tenderness eager to reach out to those who have not yet betrayed him, and he has an eloquent oneness with the nature of the island."<sup>4</sup> In short, he is not simply the deformed spawn of the devil and a witch.

Prospero implicitly contrasts Sycorax's diabolic powers with his own, which free and ennoble rather than imprison and corrupt. Yet a careful reader--or indeed, an alert member of the audience--remembers that Prospero also imprisons (justness lies in the opinion of the agent). It is implied that his powers are in some wise divine, for he can command, like the hero in a masque or the king watching one, the pagan gods. Yet when he abjures his staff and book, the strength he is left with is not divine, but mortal and fallible. The power of a true divine lies in internal strength, purity, and prayer, as the Abbess demonstrates in Comedy of Errors. There may be less between Prospero and Sycorax than there appears.

Sycorax, however, is an absent signifier.<sup>5</sup> If Shakespeare had put her upon the stage, one could more usefully analyse her portrayal. There are, however, Sycoractic resonances (both racial and magical) in Othello, which can then be linked thematically to The Comedy of Errors. Finally, many questions of witchcraft, magic,

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<sup>4</sup>R.S. White, 'Let Wonder Seem Familiar': Endings in Shakespeare's Romance Vision (London: Athlone, 1985) 166.

<sup>5</sup>This does not deny or denigrate the worth of an absent signifier; however, sufficient examples of present witches exist within Shakespeare, and I have chosen to concentrate upon these.

and miracle surface in The Winter's Tale, which also sees the questions of women's speech and sexuality return to centrality within the play. A.P. Riemer, in Antic Fables, includes Tempest, Comedy of Errors, and The Winter's Tale in the comic genre;<sup>6</sup> others contend Shakespeare's late plays are romances, or even dramatic romances. However, just as in the Henry VI tetralogy, witchcraft imagery transcends any queries raised by genre, and with H.W. Fawkner this study agrees that in certain matters, "Shakespeare's originality always tends to break the genres he seems to be serving, and there are powerful patterns of a general nature that cut right across the notion of genre."<sup>7</sup>

## II. Witchcraft in Ephesus: The Comedy of Errors

Accusations of witchcraft in Comedy of Errors are errors in and of themselves. The only magic performed in the play itself is divine in origin. Though within the play she is an unexpected reversal, the Abbess is also the linchpin, for she mediates with the supernatural to bring about the desired happy ending. Riemer believes that the Abbess is Shakespeare's first attempt at combining a Sibylline deus ex machina with a modern, learned magic:

The figure of dignified authority, in touch with forces and agencies apparently beyond the human, makes its first appearance in The Comedy of Errors. The Abbess's startling intrusion into the last act . . . is accompanied by elevated diction and by the suggestion that she controls powers beyond the ordinary through the holiness and virtue conferred upon her by her 'order.' . . . The vocabulary of Renaissance medicinal magic is reproduced in these lines [V.i.104-07] with some fidelity. The Abbess's powers are sanctioned by religion and morality; she employs natural distillations--syrups, wholesome drugs--accompanied by prayer.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>A.P. Riemer, Antic Fables (Sydney: U of Sydney P, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>H.W. Fawkner, Shakespeare's Miracle Plays (London: Associated UP, 1992) 18.

<sup>8</sup>Riemer 113. William Shakespeare, The Comedy of Errors, ed. R.A. Foakes, Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1962). All references to this edition. Henceforward Comedy of Errors in text, Err in notes.



The Abbess intends to make of her son "a formal man," which is to say a whole man, and a "Renaissance man" in the modern sense of the term. Riemer's gloss of "a formal man" is useful here. It "was a neologism in the 1590s. It has connections with the philosophical, scientific and religious interpretation of Plato's theory of Forms by his Renaissance successors."<sup>9</sup> This Neoplatonic neologism, linked as it must be with the philosophies of such scholars as Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, and others, introduces elements of high or learned magic, albeit subtly. The Abbess brings Antipholus back to his reason, which he receives from her hands as he received his life. She hands down to him her learning, for both immediate and eventual profit. Yet as she is Abbess, not priestess, the whole process is lifted from the frenzied, paranoid world of Ephesian street charlatans and witches to the holier realms of learned, respectable theurgy.

Though Ephesus is famous in Christian lore as one of the cities Paul immortalises in his Letters, Ephesus was and is famous for its Dianic temple.<sup>10</sup> The rites celebrated in Ephesus made the city infamous for producing witches, as Antipholus of Syracuse establishes early on in the play:

They say this town is full of cozenage,  
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,  
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,  
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,  
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,  
And many such-like liberties of sin:  
If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.<sup>11</sup>

Herein we see all aspects of contemporary magical belief rolled into one brief passage. Jugglers, cheaters (cozeners), and mountebanks are all one, and keep

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<sup>9</sup>Riemer 113.

<sup>10</sup>For Paul's relationship with and to magic, see Arthur Darby Nock, "Paul and the Magus," The Beginnings of Christianity, ed. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan, 1920) 164-88. Stevie Davies also discusses Paul as magus in her discussion of The Winter's Tale and The Comedy of Errors in The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature (Brighton: Harvester, 1986).

<sup>11</sup>Err I.ii.97-103.

company with the ominously-labeled "dark-working sorcerers" and "soul-killing witches." Antipholus would appear not to be a believer in magic, for he lumps all comers under the heading "cozenage," and equates all with sin (which also sets the scene for the theurgy/magia contrast in the last act). Yet he professes himself able to be convinced, and increasingly becomes so throughout the play. By III.ii he states in alarm, "There's none but witches do inhabit here, / And therefore 'tis high time that I were hence."<sup>12</sup> One can play with waxing and waning belief on Antipholus' part, depending upon the interpretation of IV.iv.145: "I see these witches are afraid of swords." There is great comic potential in this line, whether it be delivered by an Antipholus who finds great relief in the fact that he has control over one thing at least, or by one who is mocking Dromio for his sensibility: you may think them all-powerful, my friend, implies this Antipholus, but they run from a blade as a mortal does.

There is one further possibility, articulated by Dromio of Syracuse in the second act. "O for my beads; I cross me for a sinner," he cries, nervously lamenting, "This is the fairy land; O spite of spites, / We talk with goblins, elves, and sprites; / If we obey them not, this will ensue-- / They'll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue."<sup>13</sup> Fairy pinches are common in contemporary belief, and common enough in Shakespeare--one need look no further than The Tempest to see that Prospero, usurping more powers, threatens Caliban with pinching. But familiars (or black cats on their own) suck the breath from living men, or more usually babes. Incubi may also do so. This is the only instance I have found where Shakespeare conflates witch- and fairy-belief. Most of the time, they are kept wholly separate. Further confusing the muddle is Doctor Pinch himself, described as a "conjurer" and a "doting wizard."<sup>14</sup> An obvious charlatan, a false physician and an unfortunate, Pinch's name crosses the

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<sup>12</sup>155-56.

<sup>13</sup>Err II.ii.188-92.

<sup>14</sup>IV.iv.45, 56.



boundaries of three definitions: to steal, to torture and, with regard to the fact he causes one of the Antipholi to be bound, to compress or confine. Yet his name recalls the fairy pinchings as well.

This conflation or confusion could be read as a mockery of the very learning that the Abbess represents. Say what one will of the Neoplatonists, cogency and accessible clarity were rarely among their virtues or flaws. Riemer has a useful summary of difficulties encountered, quoted here at length:

The writings of the 'Platonists' - Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno and Giulio Camillo in Italy, Henry Cornelius Agrippa in Germany and John Dee and Robert Fludde [sic] in England - are filled with a confusing and confused array of assertions, misrepresentations of classical authorities, errors of fact and highly coloured but vague 'rhetoric'. Their claims are often ambiguous and paradoxical. They assert that they have discovered a prisca theologia completely in accord with Christianity, yet very often they fall into heresy. They insist that their practices are entirely natural, but the supernatural and the spiritual are never far from the extraordinary feats they claim to have performed. . . . That some of the 'Platonists' espoused the spirit of the new learning, thus heralding the emergence of the empirical sciences, is essentially misleading: the movement represents, fundamentally, a primitivism, a desire to return to a golden age of faith, of human dignity and of mankind's ability to converse with God.<sup>15</sup>

Riemer's apparent intellectual dislike of the Neoplatonists aside, one can recognise quite a few aspects of Comedy of Errors in this extract. And in a play called Comedy of Errors, who is to say what Shakespeare thought the errors included?

Despite the fact that Antipholus outlines all manner of conjurers, both he and Dromio settle on Ephesus being full, not of sorcerers, but of "Soul-killing witches that deform the body." Hence, though the merchant and officers contribute to the confusion, the blame is laid at the door of the women, witch being a sexually-charged term--predominantly at the door of Adriana, Luciana, Luce, and to some extent the unnamed courtesan. Witness, for example, Dromio of Syracuse's narration of his flight from Luce in III.ii.143-45: "I, amazed, ran from her as a witch. / And I think if

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<sup>15</sup>Riemer 112.

my breast had not been made of faith, and my heart of steel, / She had transform'd me to a curtal dog. . . ." Dromio is won over eventually by "bewitching" blandishments, which could be linked to Circean temptations, or again to the alleged tempting hospitality of the fey: "Faith, stay here this night, they will surely do us no harm; you saw they speak us fair, give us gold. Methinks they are such a gentle nation, that but for the mountain of mad flesh that claims marriage of me, I could find in my heart to stay here still and turn witch."<sup>16</sup> If indeed Ephesus were the haunt of enchantresses, witches, or fay, this advice would be fatal, for supping at Circe's table, at a witches' sabbat or in the fairy land guarantees no return or happy ending. The fact that the ending is happy and all reverses wiped away in the final act effectively debunks all suspicion. However, before the final *dénouement*, the Duke again brings in Circe, mistress of transformation: "Why, what an intricate impeach is this?" he cries, "I think you have all drunk of Circe's cup."<sup>17</sup>

The Duke includes the entire assembly, both male and female, in his surmise. Herein lies one of the most cunning reversals in the play, for whereas the Syracusans run from the Ephesians as from witches, Adriana herself is effectively crying out the Antipholus whom she erroneously believes to be her husband. In IV.ii she decries him as a "soul-killing witch who deforms the body," as one who causes her both physical and emotional pain (we see by his willingness to send for a rope-end that Antipholus of Ephesus is not averse to domestic violence). In the process, she describes him as most hags are usually described: "He is deformed, crooked, old and sere, / Ill-fac'd, worse bodied, shapeless everywhere; / Vicious, ungentle, foolish, blunt, unkind, / Stigmatical in making, worse in mind."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she alludes specifically to witch-beliefs, predominantly continental, of the witch or

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<sup>16</sup>Err IV.iv.149-54.

<sup>17</sup>V.i.270-71.

<sup>18</sup>19-22.



hag-nightmare when she pleads, "[W]itness you / That he is borne about invisible."<sup>19</sup> Though there are male continental witches, notably the Italian benandanti (who pay homage, incidentally, to the queen of the fairies), it is very rare to find such a mention in English texts. This role-reversal adds to the sense of comedy and main confusion in the play. It can lend support to Riemer's claim that, "Farce habitually dwells on the brink of chaos. Its characters live in a world which seems to have lost all semblance of logic and probability . . . in The Comedy of Errors, the well-known reputation of Ephesus as a place of sorcery and witchcraft fulfills the same purpose."<sup>20</sup>

Adriana's accusation relies on the domestic as well as the supernatural; claiming, as most victims did, the upset of her household to be due to his "witchcraft." Yet his sins are not the injunction of impotence or the spoiling of butter or milk, unless impotence can be ascribed to Adriana's intellect. Juliet Dusinberre notes that the courtesan "enjoys a partnership of the mind which should belong to his wife. Without it, Adriana is no different from a whore except in being recognised socially. Antipholus' unwillingness to treat her as an equal mentally makes it impossible for her to be one."<sup>21</sup> Intellect is therefore male-identified, in both senses of the word. The reversals in Ephesus do not extend that far.

In II.ii.110-46 Adriana pleads her virtue, its infection by desire for her husband, and its pollution by Antipholus' lack of fidelity. "For if we two be one," she argues, "and thou play false / I do digest the poison of thy flesh, / Being strumpeted by thy contagion."<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, she addresses Antipholus of Syracuse, not of Ephesus, but her logic is still sound. Her husband has betrayed her, and her right has been affected. Dusinberre notes, "Unity, in Puritan eyes, conferred on man and wife an equal division of labour. Both are responsible as individuals for their joint identity

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<sup>19</sup>V.i.186-87.

<sup>20</sup>Riemer 55.

<sup>21</sup>Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (1975; London: Macmillan, 1996) 112.

<sup>22</sup>II.ii.142-44.

as a couple. Adriana attacks her husband for a way of life he would not tolerate in her. He has divided the sacred union between them."<sup>23</sup> Again ironically, Antipholus of Syracuse recognises the nature of the union, and offers it to Luciana in III.ii.61-68, sometimes echoing Adriana's own words:

It is thyself, mine own self's better part,  
 Mine eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,  
 My food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,  
 My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim.

. . .

Call thyself sister, for I am thee;  
 Thee will I love and with thee lead my life. . . .

Antipholus of Syracuse also recognises the meeting and merging of self and other necessary to a successful marriage--in his later plays, such as Macbeth and Othello, Shakespeare toys with the dissolution of that union, which causes failure and tragedy. Typical of the confusion generated in and by Comedy of Errors, Gwyn Williams reads this scene as a bewitchment of Antipholus by Luciana, and the high rhetoric of love as the obsessive language of possession. Williams alleges,

There is an interesting ambivalence in the use made of Luciana. At a moment when Antipholus of Syracuse's identity seems to be disintegrating and he is in danger of losing all links with his past life, his new love for Luciana promises the building of a new bond, a new relationship to compensate for the loss of the old. But since a new identity is also involved, which is only viable in relation to her, this would be an act of treachery to his past and to the identity to which he is still clinging. Luciana is therefore a siren and a witch seducing him from his true self.<sup>24</sup>

Williams represents Luciana as a Circe who will turn Antipholus of Syracuse into something less than himself. This bespeaks a certain misogyny, essentially claiming that men betray their past by marrying women, who force them to redefine themselves based on their definitions alone. Irony lies in the fact that both contemporary literature and debate argue the reverse--that women allow themselves to be defined

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<sup>23</sup>Dusinberre 102.

<sup>24</sup>Gwyn Williams, Person and Persona (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1981) 35.



and, if necessary, re-defined, by the men around them. Within the play itself we have seen that reason and mental equality, though they may be restored by women acting as intermediary for the divine, are male-defined. Combined with the theoretical belief of male/female equality, this answers Williams. However, it does shed light on what Peter Erickson notes as a driving force in Shakespearean drama: male/male competing against male/female relationships.<sup>25</sup>

Antipholus of Syracuse's past is overwhelmingly male-identified, centred on himself, Dromio, and his father. He has lost his mother, and there is no hint of any female formative influence on him (which may affect his willingness to see oddly-acting women as witches). Erickson observes, "The aspiration toward a masculine purity based on the exclusion of women is linked to the general contradiction in Renaissance culture between the ideal of the whole man and the dichotomization of woman, an inherently tragic contradiction since male wholeness depends ultimately on an integrated view of women."<sup>26</sup> Erickson underlines and supports the Renaissance feminist side of the debate on the nature of women. Drawing on this, a theory may be put forth which postulates that the plays are an attempt to work out the "dark" side of women in an effort, not to subjugate it, but to integrate it into male definitions of self. But critics like Williams demonstrate that modern opinions can still be seduced by the virago/witch/wife split, examined in more detail in the preceding chapter on Macbeth.

### III. Seeming and Magic in Othello

In Othello, Desdemona also suffers the transition of Othello's belief in her.<sup>27</sup> Originally he considers her pure and loving; later, he comes to see her as a whore.

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<sup>25</sup>Peter Erickson, Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama (London: U of California P, 1985).

<sup>26</sup>Erickson 2-3.

<sup>27</sup>William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. M.R. Ridley, Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1958). All references to this edition.

The instrument in this transition is of course Iago, and Erickson explores quite fully the rivalries between the male/male relationships of Cassio/Othello and Iago/Othello. The latter is threatened not only by the former, but by the new male/female relationship between Desdemona and Othello. This replacement is most evident when Othello calls Desdemona his "fair warrior." Erickson asserts, "In its romantic dimension, Othello draws on the potential conflict between two elements in chivalric culture: devotion to heroic deeds and devotion to the lady who inspires them. The former suggests the male hero's 'unhoused free condition' (1.2.26) whereas the latter suggests subordination to a higher female power."<sup>28</sup> This subordination is intolerable for Iago, who, one assumes from what one sees of Emilia until the last scene, brooks no such thing in his own marriage.

Iago, with his statement of "I am not what I am" in I.i.65, sets himself up as a master of seeming, prefiguring the Weïrd Sisters. But he also sets the tone for the rest of the play, for by the end neither the noble Othello nor the innocent Desdemona is taken for what he or she is, though both are nominally righted at the last. What links Othello to Comedy of Errors is linked to this mis-seeming. As the Syracusans assume witchcraft because they are in Ephesus, and all in Ephesus are rumoured witches, so both irony and tragedy come from both Othello's and Desdemona's origins. Since Othello is black (like Sycorax), he is attributed all the savagery and lack of civilisation which his race was supposed to possess. Since Desdemona comes from Venice, a place so famed for its courtesans that allegedly one could not tell a courtesan from a gentlewoman, Othello can believe all too easily that what he mistook for a gentlewoman was indeed a strumpet. Suffering from misprision in the first instance, Othello tragically carries the sin over to his mistaking his wife for what she is not.

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<sup>28</sup>Erickson 90. Please note that lineations in quotes may not match lineations in the Arden edition, which is the source for this chapter.



Desdemona, in being free of speech (witness her famous backchat to Iago), also lets in, all unawares, suspicions that she is unchaste. Iago's desire for Desdemona does much to complete his mental picture. If he can imagine her unchaste, and she speaks so, she must be unchaste.<sup>29</sup> Once again women's speech and sexuality are linked, as they have been in so many witchcraft texts, and as they will be in The Winter's Tale. Desdemona's innocent and insistent pleading for Cassio in the handkerchief scene convinces Othello of her guilt, as does her prevarication about the loss of the handkerchief. It is significant that Othello chokes her, rendering her unable to speak; her miraculous revival underlines her goodness, because she is willing to sacrifice herself (remember the stigma connected to suicide) for Othello's good. Her last speech is a saintly, wifely one which, like her death, returns her to chaste, acceptable coolness.

Dusinberre notes with regard to the husband/wife entity already discussed, that a fall of one half can mean the freeing of the other, as it does in Iago's and Emilia's marriage. When Iago, who should have been in the superior moral position in the marriage, falls from grace, he allows Emilia to speak.<sup>30</sup> When she does, thereby discovering the handkerchief plot and Iago's complicity, she achieves what is, for many women, true sight. Her last utterance is "So speaking as I think, I die, I die."<sup>31</sup> She links speech, violence, and death, often a fatal trilogy.<sup>32</sup> Dusinberre's observation can be extended to Desdemona and Othello. When Othello falls from grace, Desdemona revives enough to speak. Dead already, she does not speak as she thinks.

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<sup>29</sup>Ironically, Iago can be considered right in one thing. Desdemona can be seen as having seduced Othello, in that the primary meaning of "seduce" is "to persuade (a vassal, servant, soldier, etc.) to desert his allegiance or service" (OED). Though Desdemona successfully pleads to be brought along on campaign, the campaign miraculously vapourises, and the action is cloak and dagger, taking place in closets, corridors, and boudoirs.

<sup>30</sup>Dusinberre 90.

<sup>31</sup>Othello V.ii.252.

<sup>32</sup>Frank stabs Susan in Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton, for example, only after she has gained the confidence to express free sexual longing.

Instead, she lies, and in so doing does not die as does Emilia or as Hermione will do, but gains a kind of saintly immortality.

However, Desdemona's alleged unchastity does not open her to charges of witchcraft. These are reserved for Othello, who is not only suspected of witchcraft but also is responsible for the introduction of the magical handkerchief. Immediately upon the discovery of Desdemona's flight with Othello, Brabantio suspects witchcraft, asking Roderigo, "[I]s there not charms, / By which the property of youth and maidhood / May be abus'd? Have you not read, Roderigo, / Of some such thing?"<sup>33</sup> Brabantio is anxious to found his apprehensions on definite ground--he asks Roderigo if he has read of the matter, not if he has heard it. Yet he is happy enough to go on suspicion and hearsay (which he names sense) later, when he accuses Othello, on no other ground than that she is white, young, and lovely, and he old and black. In I.ii he rants,

Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her,  
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,  
(If she in chains of magic were not bound) . . .  
Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense,  
That thou has practis'd on her with foul charms,  
Abus'd her delicate youth, with drugs or minerals . . .  
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee,  
For an abuser of the world, a practiser  
Of arts inhibited, and out of warrant.<sup>34</sup>

In the next scene, he switches his attack. Perhaps aware that at this stage he cannot make an accusation against Othello stick, he relieves the Moor of primary agency, claiming Othello hired the services of an apothecary or some such:

She is abus'd, stol'n from me and corrupted,  
By spells and medicines, bought of mountebanks,  
For nature so preposterously to err,  
(Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense)  
Sans witchcraft could not.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Othello I.i.171-74.

<sup>34</sup>63-79.



The racism in Othello is well noted and analysed in a plethora of places, and shall not therefore be analysed in this study except to note that his race predisposes people to think ill of him. Witchcraft, as being as great a sin against nature as for white to knowingly (and worse, lovingly) seek out black, is therefore the natural accusation. Similarly the debate about whether Othello was black or a Berber (swarthy or "tawny") is irrelevant to discussion; he names himself black and is considered black by the characters in the play. An Egyptian (Egypt being notable, like Persia, for the origins of magic) gave Othello's mother the handkerchief, bringing in "tawny" or mixed-race racial questions as well, all identified with Othello.

Othello refutes all accusations, and explains to the Duke that "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, / And I lov'd her that she did pity them. / This is the only witchcraft I have us'd," to which the Duke replies, "I think this tale would win my daughter too."<sup>36</sup> Note the reversal here. Othello is exculpated because of his eloquence and verbal potency. In a woman, this alone would cry her foul. In a man, it is fair, or at least fair enough. This is re-emphasised by Iago in II.iii.362-63, when he admonishes that "Thou knowest we work by wit, and not by witchcraft, / And wit depends on dilatory time." They, being men, have no need of witchcraft, wit/craft being enough.

The handkerchief is indeed magical, even if the characters are skeptical. Othello puts enough stock in the handkerchief, or at least its loss, that the story behind gains weight and credence:

... that handkerchief  
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give,  
 She was a charmer, and could almost read  
 The thoughts of people; she told her, while she kept it  
 'Twould make her amiable, and subdue my father  
 Entirely to her love: but if she lost it,  
 Or made a gift of it, my father's eye  
 Should hold her loathly, and his spirits should hunt

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<sup>35</sup>I.iii.60-64.

<sup>36</sup>I.iii.167-71.

After new fancies . . .  
 'Tis true, there's magic in the web of it;  
 A sibyl that had number'd in the world  
 The sun to make two hundred compasses,  
 In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;  
 The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk,  
 And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful  
 Conserve of maiden's hearts.<sup>37</sup>

The language of the charmer supports Erickson's thesis of relationships as power wars between male/male and female/female; Othello's father had to be "subdued" and won. Erickson states,

The love figured in the handkerchief is marked by a precarious balance of power. The handkerchief contains within it a fatalistic curse on the ideal love it ostensibly celebrates. . . .The sacred quality of female chastity, which alone justifies Othello's submission to Desdemona, is linked in advance with death. Desdemona, like the "sibyl" . . . is given the power to have and to be the sacred icon, but she lives implicitly under the sign of the maidens whose "hearts" supplied the "mummy" in which the handkerchief is embalmed.<sup>38</sup>

The love the handkerchief engenders is a sickly, possessive love. It is worth remembering here that other dramatic witches of the time claimed they could do anything except engender love. Shakespeare returns to a very primitive, Thessalian or Greek kind of spell, or even a Greco-Roman curse tablet, with all the horror it entails.

The fact that the handkerchief is dyed in an unguent made from the hearts of maidens who are dead, and whose chastity is therefore preserved beyond question, implies that Desdemona's chastity is bound symbolically in the handkerchief as well. Karen Newman believes that the loss of the handkerchief flags a greater loss or lack:

The handkerchief in Othello does indeed figure a lack, but ironically it figures not simply the missing penis but the lack around which the play's dramatic action is structured, a feminine desire that is described in the play as aberrant and "monstrous" or "monster." The handkerchief, associated with the mother, witchcraft, and the

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<sup>37</sup>III.iv.53-73. This episode is near the very centre of the play which underlines its importance. Also note the mummy, which reappears in the Weïrd Sisters' cauldron in Macbeth.

<sup>38</sup>Erickson 94.



marvelous, represents the link between femininity and the monstrous, which Othello and Desdemona's union figures in the play.<sup>39</sup>

Newman's monstrosity is another perception of the other. Desdemona embraces the other in Othello as part of her self, as Othello embraces the other in her. The loss of the handkerchief therefore also signals disintegration of marriage, a rejection of other as Other.

There exists a certain ambiguity within the handkerchief passage itself. The eventual construction of the passage makes clear that the phrase "She was a charmer, and could almost read / The thoughts of people" pertains to the Egyptian, but its immediate referent could be Othello's mother. If it were not enough that both an Egyptian and an African were in cahoots with the magic in the kerchief, Shakespeare brings in a sibyl. Admittedly sibyls were held to be virgin, but the "prophetic fury" ascribed to her as well as the description of the ingredients she used make of her a horror--or indeed a fury, a figure discussed in other chapters.

Most critics tend to see the handkerchief either as merely symbolic or as a prop made significant by paranoia and scheming. It has, however, a quality beyond this, which has not yet been noted. Othello thrice in quick succession exclaims "The handkerchief!" In so doing, he activates the spell worked into it. For it is indeed after this point that Desdemona becomes "loathly" in Othello's eyes. Desdemona has not given the handkerchief away, but she has unwittingly lost it, and so that part of the condition has been met. This is a more blatant use of the triple-speaking which Shakespeare uses in Macbeth, when Macbeth, in voicing the illusory "Sleep no more," damns himself and Lady Macbeth to the world of waking.

#### IV. The Winter's Tale: Chastity and Agency

Several issues in Othello transfer themselves to The Winter's Tale, most notably the issue of chastity. This notion is inextricably bound with the notion and

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<sup>39</sup>Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 91-92.

structure of patriarchy, perhaps more so in The Winter's Tale than in any other Shakespearean play. Whereas Erickson notes that, "The dramatic action consists partly in the fashioning of a benign patriarchy--in the transition from a brutal, crude, tyrannical version to a benevolent one capable of including and valuing women,"<sup>40</sup> Terry Eagleton, when writing of Othello, notes the dilemma that is not likely to be solved by the resolution of either play. He observes,

Within the double bind of patriarchy, there is no way in which Desdemona can behave 'properly' towards Cassio without being continually open to the suspicion of behaving 'improperly', no firm borderline between courtesy and lechery. For the woman, to be free is always to be too free; to render an exact, socially dutiful love to Cassio is to risk transgressing the norm. The woman is a constantly travestied text, perpetually open to misreading . . . unable to be proper without promiscuity, frigid when judicious, never warm without being too hot.<sup>41</sup>

Though Eagleton does not discuss The Winter's Tale in this context, his words echo Leontes' in I.ii.108: "Too hot, too hot!"<sup>42</sup> Hermione is in exactly the same bind as Desdemona, her long history of chaste marriage notwithstanding. She stays silent until the question of tongues arises in I.ii. "There is no tongue that moves, none, none i'th'world, / So soon as yours, could win me," claims Polixenes at 20-21, to which Leontes responds "Tongue-tied our queen? speak you."<sup>43</sup> If Hermione does not obey her husband, she is no good wife, if she obeys him and succeeds in persuading Polixenes to stay where her husband fails, she is the same again. Her speech and her sexuality are seen as one and the same thing. Fawcner, playing with the language of the play itself, explains,

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<sup>40</sup>Erickson 148.

<sup>41</sup>Terry Eagleton, William Shakespeare (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 68.

<sup>42</sup>William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, ed. J.H.P. Pafford, Arden ed. (London: Methuen, 1963). All references to this edition.

<sup>43</sup>27.



Flirting is nothing. It is harmless. But the nothing of flirtation is also something. It is the condition of possibility for Hermione's erotic appeal: what generally speaking delights everyone, including, up to a point, her husband. In the married woman, outward eroticism is and should be nothing/something. Otherwise she is "dead," without sex appeal (what the miraculously statuesque Hermione in the dramatic finale in a sense actually achieves). The married woman must behave erotically toward other men, otherwise she is frigid, made of marble. But the married woman must also be marblelike in her sex appeal. Nothing negotiates this difference. It is not even a difference.<sup>44</sup>

Taking into account that "nothing" could signify the female genitals in Elizabethan cant, then Leontes' rant in I.ii.284-96 becomes not just jealous but downright vulgar, and another mark in his behaviour unfit for king and husband. Jealousy also is not envious love, but covetousness. Eagleton glosses, "female sexuality is either in one place--the male's private possession--or it is everywhere."<sup>45</sup> The appeal of the marble or marble-like woman goes further than sex and sexuality, however. If Hermione is a statue come to life, then she is reborn without sin, without taint of any kind, beyond any man's doubt, even Leontes'. She is woman without flaw, she is Galatea, brought to life for one man alone, and let that man not be jealous.

Leontes' jealousy has its roots not just in the fact that his wife speaks at her behest, but rather in the fact that she continues to speak when not requested to do so. This willful speech makes her unruly. To underline this point, Shakespeare has Polixenes introduce the dichotomization of women quite swiftly. In the same speech one finds the recurrence of Erickson's male/male versus male/female relationships:

Pol. O my most sacred lady,  
Temptations have since then been born to's: for  
In those unfledg'd days was my wife a girl;  
Your precious self had then not cross'd the eyes  
Of my young play-fellow.

Her. Grace to boot!  
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say  
Your queen and I are devils.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Fawkner 89.

<sup>45</sup>Eagleton 66.

The first line prefigures the pedestal on which Hermione will literally be placed at the end of play. The Edenic days of the two boys are spoiled by the introduction of the second sex. Polixenes, whilst talking himself into a rhetorical hole, also implies that Hermione skews (crosses) Leontes' vision--which is of course what happens during the course of the scene.

His vision crossed, Leontes' judgment suffers, as does the construction of his speech. He becomes overly parenthetical, at first discounting any value in women's speech: "women say so, / (That will say any thing)." The ensuing two parenthetical comments form a triplet which demonstrates Leontes' sexual unease with Hermione's freedom: "(And that beyond commission)" and "(And that to the infection of my brains / And hard'ning of my brows.)"<sup>47</sup> The hardening of his brows refers to cuckold's horns.

Hermione's nobility of spirit is proven in the trial scene, where she herself realises that whatever she says will be used against her. Only her husband interprets her speech thus but, as Dusinger points out, "Leontes scoffs at his wife's defence. . . .He interprets her eloquence as effrontery, urging condemnation of her not for what she says, but for saying it at all. Fearless speech spells shamelessness, a masculine disregard for feminine propriety."<sup>48</sup> She waits for other words--the Oracle's--to verify hers. Herein lies one of The Winter's Tale's many curiosities. Shakespeare, as has been realised, conflates Delos, birthplace of Apollo and Artemis, with Delphi, Apollo's most famous oracle. But the gentlemen sent to the Oracle speak of a priest and not a priestess. Apollo's oracles were, if not all, predominantly female. Leontes' distrust in the Oracle may spring from his distrust of women's words, if he realises that Apollo's prophets are prophetesses.<sup>49</sup> Even in the divine

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<sup>46</sup>I.ii.76-82.

<sup>47</sup>I.ii.130-31, 144, 145-46.

<sup>48</sup>Dusinger 220.

<sup>49</sup>This either ironises the fact that Cleomenes and Dion see a priest, or requires audience knowledge that a (male) priest would scribe the prophetess' words.



sphere in The Winter's Tale one sees female prerogative being usurped--a woman must not presume to interpret a man's words. Interpretation is solely a masculine function. This is one of the imbalances which Paulina will correct, for she rightly interprets the Oracle's words. (Her husband, in contrast, misinterprets the dream of Hermione he receives to mean her guilt.)

When Hermione swoons and dies at the end of the trial scene, she lapses into a sixteen-year silence which eventually proves her chastity. Silence again links Hermione with Desdemona. Valerie Traub notes,

This masculine imposition of silence, and more particularly of stasis, on women is connected . . . with a fear of chaos associated with the sexual act. Hamlet, Othello and Leontes all express a longing for stasis, for a reprieve from the excitations and anxieties of erotic life; and, in response to their fear that such security and calm are not forthcoming, they metaphorically displace their own desire for stasis onto the women with whom they are most intimate. The result: the fetishization of the dead, virginal Ophelia, the sexualized death of Desdemona, and the transformation of Hermione into a living but static form, a statue.<sup>50</sup>

After her sixteen-year silence, Hermione does not reclaim her former eloquence, which marks the fact that all may not be well. Hence Traub's further observation that, "Upon her revivification, Hermione is granted one speech of eight lines, and this speech a maternal blessing and query directed toward her daughter. Her silence toward Leontes bespeaks a submissiveness most unlike her previous animation. Rather than being a victory for the wronged heroine, the final scene works a wish fulfillment for Leontes."<sup>51</sup> If Hermione does not speak to her husband, he cannot misread her. Dusinger poetically sums up the situation thus: "After sixteen years, Leontes and Hermione embrace silently. The trial scene desecrated words between them."<sup>52</sup> Hermione's continued silence belies the words Leontes' speaks at V.iii.91-

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<sup>50</sup>Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare's Plays," Shakespeare Studies 1988, 215-38. 216.

<sup>51</sup>Traub 230.

<sup>52</sup>Dusinger 221.

94: "What you can make her do, / I am content to look on: what to speak, / I am content to hear; for 'tis as easy / To make her speak as move." His willingness to hear Hermione is grounded in his belief that it is impossible.

A. Lynne Magnusson does not realise this in the otherwise solid observation, "To do, to move, to speak--the furthest reaches of Leontes' desire are the most commonplace actions of a flesh-and-blood woman, Hermione with wrinkles, Hermione as her 'isness' is illuminated by the contrived 'otherness' of the statue device. The ending of the play . . . locates its ideal in the actual."<sup>53</sup> In this the play differs from most witchcraft accusations, which mislocate the actual to an inverted ideal.

As Hermione is silenced, Paulina gains her tongue. Her own tongue, and Hermione's. Carolyn Asp notes that after Leontes, Paulina, not Hermione or any of the male characters, speaks the most lines.<sup>54</sup> And Paulina's tongue is a decidedly unruly member. Thus, although magical language occurs elsewhere throughout the play, usually exculpating Leontes' irrationality, it is no wonder that Leontes names Paulina a "mankind witch."<sup>55</sup> Secondly, Leontes cannot tolerate Paulina's speech because it is as free, perhaps freer, than Hermione's. Davies avers, "Paulina is Hermione's attendant; she is her shadow, her voice, her devoted follower. Only to the unseeing Leontes is Paulina a 'mankind witch.'"<sup>56</sup>

Riemer claims that magic in The Winter's Tale enters with the pastoral, and culminates with Paulina's magic in the fifth act, when pastoral combines with "reality": "The fantastical enters into its fabric not only in terms of events . . . but also

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<sup>53</sup>A. Lynne Magnusson, "Finding Place for a Faultless Lyric: Verbal Virtuosity in The Winter's Tale," The Upstart Crow 9 (1990): 105.

<sup>54</sup>Carolyn Asp, "Shakespeare's Paulina and the Consolatio Tradition," Shakespeare Studies 1978: 145-58.

<sup>55</sup>II.iii.67.

<sup>56</sup>Davies 170.



in atmosphere and diction."<sup>57</sup> However, Archidamus in I.i sets up a dreamy, magical almost drugged atmosphere in his allusion to Circe's cup: "We will give you sleepy drinks, that your senses (unintelligent of our insufficiency) may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us."<sup>58</sup> Though he sets his speech in the unlikely event of Sicilia coming unto Bohemia, the verb "will" is not conditional, and the line does almost read as an address to the audience. Circean imagery is not lacking in Shakespeare's works, but if one wanted to link Archidamus' speech with another Odyssean episode, say the lotus-eaters, the observation still stands, for the hint of an altered state of vision or perception opens the play.

The interchange in I.ii between Camillo and Polixenes can also be read as including formal or formulaic magical language. Camillo confesses the truth of the situation to Polixenes only after the latter binds him with a speech which begins with "I conjure thee, by all the parts of man / Which honour does acknowledge."<sup>59</sup>

Leontes, Hermione, and Paulina all have recourse to astrology to explain the unnatural, with different reasons. Leontes exclaims,

Should all despair  
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind  
Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none;  
It is a bawdy planet, that will strike  
Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful, think it,  
From east, west, north, and south; be it concluded,  
No barricado for a belly.<sup>60</sup>

This, especially combined with his earlier lines in the same speech about Sir Smile "sluicing" a man's wife in his absence, reveals Leontes' belief in an exterior agency for adultery. That is to say, a wife's adultery is due to the influence of the stars, or the slimy, smiling, pseudo-benevolence of a neighbour, but not to the husband himself.

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<sup>57</sup>Riemer 85.

<sup>58</sup>13-16.

<sup>59</sup>400-01.

<sup>60</sup>I.ii.198-204.

Thus Leontes neatly escapes from any blame, at least in his own eyes. Hermione also looks to an astrological cause when she apostrophises, "There's some ill planet reigns: / I must be patient till the heavens look / With an aspect more favourable."<sup>61</sup>

Hermione is unable to believe that the fault does lie in her husband, and so places the blame outside him. She will, of course, be disillusioned. There is also supposition that Leontes is mad north-by-northwest, so to speak. Paulina speaks of "unsafe lunes i'th'king," and Polixenes compares the moon's influence upon the sea to Leontes as well: "Swear his thought over / By each particular star in heaven, and / By all their influences; you may as well / Forbid the sea for to obey the moon. . . "<sup>62</sup> Lunatics wax and wane with the moon, and their madness comes and goes suddenly. One may use this explanation if one seeks reasons for the sudden onset of Leontes' jealousy, and his just-as-sudden repentance and complete reversal after the deaths of Hermione and Mamillius. Finally, there is a hint of something odd in the journey of Cleomenes and Dion to the oracle, which may be another thing subconsciously bothering Leontes. Their journey has been too fast: "their speed / Hath been beyond account."<sup>63</sup>

But aside from these brief references, the bulk of the charge of witch and magical imagery lies with Paulina, and to a lesser extent Perdita. Taking the lesser first, Perdita's eloquence and her ability to fascinate a man apparently so much above her in station causes Polixenes to cry her out. "And thou, fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft," he cries, revealing himself, "I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briers and made / More homely than thy state."<sup>64</sup> To draw blood from a witch negates her powers. Much like Brabantio in the face of Desdemona's defection, Polixenes is unable to bring himself to believe that a shepherd's daughter can legally captivate a prince.

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<sup>61</sup>II.i.105-07.

<sup>62</sup>II.ii.29; I.ii.427.

<sup>63</sup>II.iii.196-97.

<sup>64</sup>IV.iv.423-27.



Shakespeare also creates a subtle irony in the pastoral, for he leaves one niggling doubt about Perdita. In I.ii Leontes abjures Mamillius "Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I / Play too."<sup>65</sup> Magnusson notes that,

Perdita is reluctant to play-act at being a goddess; for her, to play-act is not to be her actual self, not to be natural. In the scene, Perdita follows her own disposition, arguing with Polixenes against art, spontaneously and naturally distributing flowers to welcome her guests. But as she strews flowers about the stage, she realizes, to her own surprise, that what she does resembles play-acting.<sup>66</sup>

Perdita in that scene closes the circle of play that Leontes opens in his early speech.

Paulina does not fit into any of Leontes' schemes, and this places her outside his reach. This enables her to orchestrate a happy ending, and at the end of the play, as at the beginning of his repentance, Leontes depends on her to lead him aright. In the meantime, however, he protests bitterly and violently. Patricia Southard Gourlay, supporting the theorem that Paulina is unruly woman, believes she is "subversive woman, truth-teller and, finally, artist, whose truth challenges Leontes' masculine order."<sup>67</sup> Asp places Paulina in the European consolatio tradition, and makes her characterisation a laurel in Shakespeare's wreath: "[S]he performs the more transcendental function of counseling Leontes and finally guiding him to a secular beatitude; in this role, she appears to be unique in English Renaissance literature."<sup>68</sup> Davies goes further. Paulina is a reversal of normal magical powers, a mage of the "high" order usually monopolized by men such as Dee and Prospero. She is "the unprecedented figure of the woman magus (Paul [of Ephesian fame] converts to Paulina), and connects her and her art with the female mythology of Eleusis."<sup>69</sup> This

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<sup>65</sup>187-88.

<sup>66</sup>Magnusson 104.

<sup>67</sup>Patricia Southard Gourlay, "O my most sacred lady': Female Metaphor in The Winter's Tale," English Literature of the Renaissance 5 (1975): 382.

<sup>68</sup>Asp 145.

<sup>69</sup>Davies 166.

is a radical revision on Shakespeare's part. Verna A. Foster avers that Paulina "functions, in effect, as both priestess of Apollo and surrogate dramatist."<sup>70</sup> Leontes sees her as threat and interloper. He calls her "a mankind witch," "a most intelligencing bawd," "crone," "a gross hag," "midwife," and, tellingly, "lewd-tongu'd wife [of Antigonus]."<sup>71</sup> These terms are used apparently interchangeably, and once again demonstrate the overlap between female eloquence, sexuality, and witchcraft, "malign and destructive powers that he [Leontes] imputes to women."<sup>72</sup> Leontes is, of course, the voice of the patriarchal ruler--that Shakespeare clearly undermines his opinion argues for a more open criticism than in his other plays.

Nicolas Kiessling believes that Leontes' rejoinder "a gross hag" refers specifically to the hag-incubus, which he describes as follows: "The hag-incubus, as depicted in popular medieval and Renaissance literature, could engage in sexual intercourse with a woman during the night, could appear in disguised form while engaged in this act, and could cause pregnancy or, alternatively, after a legitimate child was born, could substitute a changeling for the true child."<sup>73</sup> If this is true, the logical extension of Kiessling's claim is that Leontes, in his towering rage, nearly relieves Hermione of guilt and accuses Paulina of switching babes. He does not carry through, however, being more bent on "simple" punishment than reason.

Leontes also displaces what most critics term his sexual nausea onto Paulina. In addition to the list above, he calls her, "A callat / Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband, / And now baits me!"<sup>74</sup> "Bait" connotes incitation and exasperation, true, but the OED gives a secondary meaning of temptation. Leontes

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<sup>70</sup>Verna A. Foster, "The 'Death' of Hermione: Tragicomic Dramaturgy in *The Winter's Tale*," *Cahiers Elisabethains* 43 (1993): 46.

<sup>71</sup>II.iii.67, 68, 76, 107, 159, 171.

<sup>72</sup>Davies 168.

<sup>73</sup>Nicolas Kiessling, "*The Winter's Tale* II.iii.103-7: An Allusion to the Hag-Incubus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977): 94.

<sup>74</sup>II.iii.90-92.



now sees adultery everywhere. "Callat" denotes a lewd woman or strumpet, and again is defined by her unruly tongue, which has escaped her husband's control. Leontes follows up with a command to take both Paulina and the infant away, and burn them along with Hermione. Again, at 113, he threatens, "I'll ha' thee burnt," to which Paulina rightly replies "I care not: / It is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in 't."<sup>75</sup>

Robert Egan claims death by fire is the "punishment due to necromancy."<sup>76</sup> (It must be remembered that necromancy in a medieval or Renaissance frame means consorting with demons and spirits, and not necessarily the dead.) However, burning is the punishment for heresy, not witchcraft. Whereas this could be a reference to the fact that necromancy was believed to be kept alive in the Church, and therefore conviction thereof was heresy, it is far more likely that Leontes, about to commit the ultimate heresy of disbelief in the Oracle, is in his madness proclaiming it heresy to speak against him. His guilt extends to hubris.

"The violence of his [Leontes'] reaction," writes Gourlay, "suggests the degree to which his world is shaken by Paulina's refusal to play the part assigned to her. It is her tongue that frightens him, because he cannot stop it by his civil power. He calls her 'a callet / of boundless tongue' [sic] and offers to hang Antigonus, a more pliant subject, because he can't 'stay her tongue.'"<sup>77</sup> Paulina is mannish in her self-confidence and verbal virtuosity. She says she would champion Hermione against Leontes physically, if she could: "And [I] would by combat make her good, so were I / A man, the worst about you."<sup>78</sup> Since she cannot, however, she shall use words and wit, which she boldly deems women's weapons. She boldly proclaims that, "I'll use that tongue I have: if wit flow from't / As boldness from my bosom, let't not be

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<sup>75</sup>II.iii.113-15.

<sup>76</sup>Robert Egan, Drama Within Drama (1972; London: Columbia UP, 1975) 66.

<sup>77</sup>Gourlay 383.

<sup>78</sup>II.iii.60-61.

doubted / I shall do good."<sup>79</sup> This is her rallying cry, and it is as powerful and truthful as any of her speech. She does do well, as well as doing good.

The last scene is problematic in its nature. There is a great debate on art and nature in The Winter's Tale. One point worth noting is that this debate is gendered:

The discussion is infinite and insoluble, a serious game with words, if we consider it only in the terms of male art and male life, and conversation in these terms is of course both appropriate and delightful. But if we add the possibility of translating the question into the opposite gender, a source of self-complete meaning becomes available. In life there is one artistic process, and only one, which fulfills all of the metaphorical requirements of the raising of the statue: birth itself, the whitest magic.<sup>80</sup>

In this sense, both Hermione and Leontes are being reborn, by the agency of a woman. This, too, is not something other magi achieve, of either sex. They can breathe life into inanimate things, or make corpses breathe again (like Erictho), but they birth nothing.

Critics also debate whether or not Hermione actually dies. Truth in this case is irrelevant. What matters are the scene's trappings; the language and the methods used by Paulina in restoring Hermione. "The aura of Hermetic mystery around Hermione and especially around her image," muses Gourlay, "invites from the audience the divided response that Neoplatonic theurgy itself provoked: faith and skepticism, awe and horror."<sup>81</sup> Modern critics favour the skepticism, as Riemer exemplifies. He refers to Paulina's arts as "benevolent therapeutic practices," much like the Abbess' in Comedy of Errors, and continues that Paulina's "altruistic and providential designs come to seem miraculous and magical, but they are based upon purely natural causes, the ebb and flow of life, as revealed by Apollo's oracle."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>II.iii.52-54.

<sup>80</sup>Davies 166.

<sup>81</sup>Gourlay 394.

<sup>82</sup>Riemer 140.



Riemer then backsteps, claiming an affinity between Paulina and Prospero, though Paulina has no reliance upon props and/or trappings (which could, in light of my earlier argument, argue for Paulina's divine numen).

Certainly, there is some ceremony in the final act. When Paulina cries "Music, awake her; strike" at V.iii.98, it almost certainly cues some sort of ritual event, and without a doubt holds Orphic resonances. Leontes acknowledges a certain kind of magic when he addresses the statue, saying, "There's magic in thy majesty, which has / My evils conjur'd to remembrance, and / From thy admiring daughter took the spirits, / Standing like stone with thee." Skepticism comes, probably, from mis-emphasising Leontes' famous line "If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating."<sup>83</sup> One should not emphasise the "if" clause; rather, one should emphasise the pronouncement "Let it be." This voices anxiety about the proceedings which many commentators overlook, despite Paulina's disclaimers. Disclaimers of lawfulness would not be necessary if the issue were not grey. Asp believes that, "The consolatio figure is always dominant in the relationship and seems to possess part of the divine numen, a fact that gives her words authority and a certain infallibility within the limits of her nature. She is usually a solitary figure, so that her preeminence is not compromised by the complications of conflicting authorities."<sup>84</sup> This goes a fair way to explaining Antigonus' demise, possibly one of the most famous stage directions of all: "Exit, pursued by a bear."<sup>85</sup> Paulina cannot be solitary if her husband is alive. But there is more to this solitary figure than just this.

Many critics have noted the quietly fecund Ceres/Persephone imagery in the last act, and several have pointed to the Eleusinian Mysteries as a result. Logically, this can be extended one step further, especially in light of how Paulina describes herself, as an "old turtle" which seeks out some "wither'd bough." Clearly, we are

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<sup>83</sup>V.iii.110-11.

<sup>84</sup>Asp 150.

<sup>85</sup>III.iii.

dealing with triadic women here, in the form of maiden (Perdita), mother (Hermione, recalling that her only speech at the end is a maternal blessing) and crone (Paulina).<sup>86</sup> As has been demonstrated throughout this study, crones have or are perceived to have vast amounts of power. Leaving them floating about, like Margaret in the wings of Richard III, is dangerous. Hence the rapidly arranged marriage to Camillo. If, as Cynthia does with Dipsas in Endimion, Leontes can reassimilate Paulina into his order, then his ending will indeed be a "happy ever after." No threats remain; both his relationship with his wife and his boyhood friend have been satisfied and reinstated. From the man's point of view, nothing can go wrong.

The relationships between women, however, are not so happily or so easily resolved. Paulina is de-fused, relegated after her major role to calm, orderly wifedom; Hermione is silent; and Perdita, also previously eloquent, has as her father observes caught her mother's silence. Though Erickson notes that "[t]he two claims of allegiance to the man (and to the patriarchal power structure) and of allegiance to the woman are balanced against each other, preventing either from becoming too all-encompassing," he also realises that in a way the balance is one-sided. Female/female relationships are needed to complete the balance. Unfortunately, as Erickson also observes,

Relations between women are present either as lost opportunities--as in the case of Gertrude's elegy for Ophelia--or as subsidiary events peripheral to the male-centered action--as in the case of the brief reunion of Hermione and Perdita where the full potency of the Ceres-Proserpina analogue and its connection to the Eleusinian mysteries are obscured. Similarly, the bond between Hermione and Paulina is kept largely off-stage.<sup>87</sup>

This lack of female relationships mutes the women in The Winter's Tale, so that the character the audience remembers most is Leontes. Having spent years locked as a

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<sup>86</sup>Davies supports this with reference to the Eleusinian goddess triad, which was in effect one deity; she states Hecate became a midwife figure (167). This can be extended to support my earlier point.

<sup>87</sup>Erickson 7-8.



silent statue or corpse, a mute witness to male power structures and interpretations about which she can do nothing, Hermione, when she returns to “life,” remains as powerless as she was in exile or death. Though Paulina cracks the code of the male art form into which Hermione is placed, she delivers both herself and Hermione willingly into the marriages which contain and nullify unruly women. The fact that she goes willingly further undercuts her previous unruliness, for she turns into a self-policing woman, who does not have to have her punishment imposed from the outside. She even sees this “happy ever after” as a desirable state.

Similarly, though perhaps never so alive as when she talks to Emilia, Desdemona is generally held to be a “weak” role, because we do not see the vivacity in her we see in Paulina, or in the women in the Henry VI tetralogy, who manage to interact and therefore present themselves more strongly. Desdemona, by becoming a perfect corpse, is likewise turned into a male-created, male-codified art form, one which, since it cannot speak for itself, will continue to be interpreted by those who control the society which sees her. When with her last breath she attempts to exculpate Othello to Emilia, Desdemona tacitly accedes to his interpretation of events (which is essentially of Iago’s making). She is never in control, either of her image in the eyes of men who perceive her, nor of the workings of the play, which prove her downfall. She remains powerless. Emilia’s position as a servant renders her powerless from the start; when she dares to speak out, she dies.

Adriana and Luciana have one strong scene, but events are well beyond both their control and their ken. Both are reconciled to society through marriage, though neither truly left the prescribed boundaries of that society in the first place. Adriana is brought to see her unruliness of speech and attitude as bad and, when she makes that admission, loses her potency as a character. No female character achieves any sort of driving agency in The Comedy of Errors; no female character stands out from the rest of the cast as particularly powerful or noteworthy. The long-term impression

one receives of Comedy of Errors is one of confusion with a vague happy ending (which indicates its success as a play).

However, common to all three plays is the fact that witchcraft or accusations of witchery are not applied as steadfastly or as earnestly to any of the female characters, or even any of the male characters, though occult terminology and magical language and/or situations exist in all three. Paulina does not achieve the status of Lady Macbeth, Margaret of Anjou or Joan of Arc simply because she has little ambiguity. She is threatening, but she is ultimately contained by allegedly happy ever after which is male-defined and which relocates her within a male power structure. She does not step sufficiently out of bounds, being neither true hag, transvestite, or virago. Adriana does not even truly merit the epithet "shrew." Desdemona, whatever her interpretation, is ultimately a hapless victim. Her fate has been achieved by malice and magic, but she has not partaken of it. Driving agency is necessary for a true virago, or even a "real" hag or witch. The fact that these women lack it privileges the male characters and allows the story to be almost wholly theirs.



CHAPTER 9. VILLAINY, INTERRELATIONSHIP AND WITCHCRAFT IN THE WITCH

In researching and writing about Middleton's The Witch, one is struck by two things: first, the virulence with which Heccat, the witch herself, is portrayed; and second, the disregard for and marginalisation of the text itself.<sup>1</sup> Though Heccat is every bit as fearsome a witch as Lucan's Erictho, whom she resembles strongly, and can be argued to frame or even order the play, there is a tendency in what little critical analysis there is on the play to discount her and her cohorts as comic relief, as no threat, or merely as an anti-masque. Laird Barber claims that, "The three witch scenes . . . contain even more elements of musical comedy and are quite out of keeping with the tragedy . . . [of] the rest of the play. . . most of the play's three witch scenes is given over to jiggling verses."<sup>2</sup> Diane Purkiss alleges that, "Hecate's power to dry up generation ought to be a serious threat, as should her incestuous relationship with her son, but no frisson of real fear or disorder attends these revelations in Middleton."<sup>3</sup> Such claims as these privilege the songs in the text whilst silently discounting the incantations and orations Heccat makes. They also fail to take into account the fear, horror, and respect that Heccat instills in the play's characters, and the fact that she accomplishes precisely everything she sets out to do. Similarly, those who claim with Richard Hindry Barker that, "The Witch is the least interesting play in the [tragicomedic] group," and dismiss it as a mere "companion piece" to other Middletonian efforts effectively rob the play of its own identity.<sup>4</sup> Barker realises this theft, as does Purkiss when she observes, "[R]eadings of The Witch subordinate it to

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Middleton, The Witch, eds. L. Drees and Henry deVocht (Louvain: Librairie Universitaire, 1945). All references to this edition. Please note that the play is lined continuously; line numbers do not refresh with each scene.

<sup>2</sup>Laird H. Barber, An Edition of The Late Lancashire Witches by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome (London: Garland, 1979) 26.

<sup>3</sup>Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (London: Routledge, 1996) 219. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Hindry Barker, Thomas Middleton (1958; Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1974) 92.

another text, deemed more original and authoritative: whether seen as fashionable, exploitative, or scandalous, The Witch is always seen as a recapitulation of a story from elsewhere."<sup>5</sup> However, no one attempts to discover why this discounting goes on, or even guesses why Middleton might choose to place his witch in a line of direct descent from Erictho and Circe. Cracks in the logic of the critics underline that rationalising and marginalising are going on: Purkiss, for example, describes "an almost unrecognisable and practically inhuman monstrosity, the witch Hecate," a curious phrase considering the fact that Purkiss also alleges that Heccat has no power to inspire fear or horror.<sup>6</sup>

Despite what most critics dismiss as stereotypical Italianate drama, Middleton does take care to create relationships and interrelationships in his play. His play explores several facets of women and female sexuality, though the view that predominates at the end of the play is a heavily patriarchal one, in which chastity and honesty (especially sexual honesty) are the only female values which count. The entire play hinges on and revolves around women--a fact which can be explained when one takes care to note that all of the crimes and devices in this play are domestic. The plot revolves around bedrooms, sex, and dining. The first action is the marriage of Antonio and Isabella, which is founded upon a lie told by a philanderer who may desire his wife, but who may actually love Florida, the courtesan. At the marriage feast, the Duke commits an atrocity easily equal to any of Heccat's: he forces the entire company barring the bride to sup from the skull of the Duchess's dead and conquered father. Their marriage clearly is based upon physical conquest, and the characters recognise this. It makes them uneasy. Antonio comments, "I doe not like the Fate-on't," Francisca refers to the act as "the worst Fright that could come . . ." and the Duchess herself gasps in an aside, "did ever cruell, barbarous Act match

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<sup>5</sup>Purkiss 217.

<sup>6</sup>Purkiss 217.



this?"<sup>7</sup> And if indeed a reader's judgment is that Heccat lacks the power to cause true horror, it is because Middleton in this first scene introduces a horror in the Duke. The Duchess's plots to rid herself of her tyrant fail because of male machinations, and though the Duke says he will no longer use her father as a drinking vessel, there is no sense that he has suffered a change of heart. He takes charge of the final scene, and once "resurrected" lets no one else speak, rendering the play, in effect, his version of the truth. The key point which lets him forgive his wife whose "Intent synd" is the discovery that she is still chaste. Otherwise he would have let her blood spill as happily as he spilled her father's.<sup>8</sup>

In the first scene, Middleton sets up many parallels, some of which require more careful or willing reading than has previously been given the play. As mentioned, the Duke drinks wine, simulating blood, out of the skull. The Duchess drinks it. Fernando first mentions this theme before the banquet, when he observes of Sebastian that, "His Sighes drinck life- Blood- in, this time of feasting."<sup>9</sup> Ironically, Heccat does not drink blood at any time during the play, nor does she devour human flesh, though she uses it in her spells and admits to killing to obtain it. Instead, she grants it to her Spirits and familiar(s).

Set up imagistically, then, are parallels between the two characters who commit atrocities of (or because of) their own power, and between the two people who consult Heccat out of either (or both) love and revenge. In the subplot, Almachildes seeks a love-charm to win the favours of the stand-offish Amoretta. This seems a relatively harmless pastime. Love-charms and curses have been the province of petitioners of magic for as long as we have record, as the Greek magical

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<sup>7</sup>I.i (191, 204, 208).

<sup>8</sup>V.iii.(2215). One wonders whether the "Greif and Hono<sup>r</sup>" the Duchess demonstrate are actually for her husband's apparent demise. Her speech merely shows that she realises she has sinned against marriage, and she never speaks after the Duke takes control.

<sup>9</sup>I.i (79).

papyri, myriad Roman curse tablets, and other sources witness.<sup>10</sup> As Amoretta's behaviour changes drastically according to whether or not the ribbon is in contact with her, the audience notes exactly how efficacious Heccat's work is.

In II.ii, however, the audience is given brief notice of yet another parallel: Amoretta shares the Duchess' name, and a name which is based upon the very word love. Thus a hitherto uncommented-upon level of irony is introduced, and Almachildes is drawn into the main plot. Seeking Amoretta's favours, the Duchess tricks him into believing he has received hers. Although it is not stated explicitly, the audience may be left to believe that, in a ploy common to medieval and Renaissance texts, the maid has stood in for her lady. In the finale, however, Amoretta reveals that Almachildes has in fact slept with a common strumpet. Blindfolded, he could not tell the difference between either one of the Amoretas and an instrument of common lust.

This commentary cuts in both directions. Almachildes, the typical light-hearted lover, has not the perception to distinguish his alleged true-love (an inverse of Aberzanes, who admits his shallowness and roaming propensities when he states of Francisca's child, "I love to get 'em, but not to keepe'em.")<sup>11</sup> Almachildes finds in himself a kind of nobility of action in his dilemma; Aberzanes is "punished"--and he does consider it a punishment--by having to marry Francisca. Both of these men therefore reform, or are reformed, in one way or another. Conversely, a parallel may be extended from the Amoretas to the "Professo<sup>r</sup> of Lust, and Impudence."<sup>12</sup> No matter how chaste they appear in daylight, all women are alike in the dark.

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<sup>10</sup>The love-charm does not necessarily imply that Heccat has power where other witches, such as Dipsas, fail to. Amoretta's behaviour verifies that the charm is merely a trinket; Heccat's spell does not influence the true emotions of the woman, does not inspire love in the sense that, for example, Lyly's Cynthia does in *Endimion*.

<sup>11</sup>II.iii (919-20).

<sup>12</sup>V.iii (2202-03).



The five non-occult women in the play serve different functions, but all are linked to their sexuality. Isabella is approved of, as both virtuous wife and true lover. She also does not drink from the skull, does not suffer its taint. The Duchess is reclaimed, her plans seen through and foiled by men, Almachildes in particular. Revenge is appropriate for Sebastian, a man, but not for the Duchess. Almachildes sees through her plan, not because it is not clever, but because of her sex. He swears, "Yf I trust her as She's a Woman, Let one of her long Haires wind about my hart, and be the end of me. . . ." <sup>13</sup> Likewise, though he remains deceived by the blindfold trick until the very end of the play, Almachildes states in IV.iv of the Duchess, "He that beleeues you not / goes the right way to heauen, o' my conscience" (1443-44). Here belief in women, especially sexual women (Almachildes believes her unchaste) is damning. Almachildes also notes that he must spurn "Spoone - Meate" at 1461; amongst other (mainly sexual) connotations, this phrase also connotes the long-handled spoon needed to sup with the Devil, and backs up the assertion made in 1443-44.

Having her plot seen through and scotched by the most credulous and perhaps foolish of the men (and one whose lack of wisdom and drunkenness, as the audience know, leads him to consult, dine with, and be enjoyed by Hecate), humiliates the Duchess in her own eyes and in the audience's. Moreover, the structure of the play and of the state doom her as well, granting her a double humiliation as the play progresses. Once she starts on her plot, effectively killing the myth of her loving, submissive marriage, the populace explode into discontent (the macrocosm mirrors the microcosm). Only the Duke, the repressive, controlling patriarch, can put things right and quell disorder. To do so, he must quell "his" disorderly woman. Elaine Hobby writes, "To see the family as a centre of loving harmony that can be contrasted to public discontent, one has to forget the inequality of power that could be made

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<sup>13</sup>IV.i (1426-28).

manifest in rape."<sup>14</sup> Rape can be psychological as well as physical; the Duke's tactics have never been gentle, and of course it is easiest to forget power inequality if one possesses the greater power. As Hobby observes, "The power of the husband is directly tied . . . to the structure of domination and subordination within the state."<sup>15</sup> At the end of the play the Duchess has not advanced one step from her predicament at the beginning of the play: though her father's skull is "retired," she still has no recourse to anyone's actions except men's. (It has already been noted that the Duchess's chastity is all that saves her life.) Hence her reclamation. Her maid, Amoretta, reserves a curiously neutral role at the end. She defends her lady's honour and incidentally her own, and places her hope in "a Maids Comfort either in faithfull service, or blesd Marriage."<sup>16</sup> She retreats into a standard role, without flavour or any of the (shrewish) personality she evinces earlier in the play.

Francisca is condemned, both by herself and others, especially the wifely-righteous Isabella. Tellingly, after her marriage to Aberzanes, she says nothing at all. Antonio arranges it so that she cannot—by killing her. Her sexual errors and proclivity have been contained within apparent respectability, and therefore her tongue has been completely contained as well. She does, however, serve to create a parallel between Isabella and the Duchess. After Isabella departs to rendezvous with Caelio/Sebastian, Francisca states, "I know / she do's not love me now, but painfully, / like one that's forc'd to smile vpon a greif / to bring some purpose forward: and J'll pay her / in her owne Mettle."<sup>17</sup> This image harks back to the banquet scene, and the Duchess' forced adherence to the Duke's abhorrent custom. In this speech Francisca loses her virginity of purpose. Before this, she was a victim; her desire for any sort of

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<sup>14</sup>Elaine Hobby, "The Politics of Gender," The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry, Donne to Marvell, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 46.

<sup>15</sup>Hobby 45. Though her argument treats of cavalier poetry (specifically Carew's "A Married Woman" in this instance), much of it may usefully be applied here.

<sup>16</sup>V.iii (2219-20).

<sup>17</sup>IV.iii (1679-83)



revenge enters her into the company of conspirators. Like Florida below, she desires to bring someone else low simply because she has fallen herself.

Isabella sweetly toys with her own sexuality and the lack of its fulfillment. Sebastian states she becomes waspish for want of satisfaction, but Sebastian has a vested interest in perceiving a complete lack of regard on Isabella's behalf. In truth, Isabella seeks to please her husband throughout the first half of the play, and it is only through a ruse attacking her husband's fidelity, which she is loath to suspect (witness III.ii), that Sebastian gains access to his beloved. The Duke, as the ruling voice and viewpoint of the play, both emphasises the importance of potency/fertility and defines Isabella's worth only as a bedmate and bearer of (male) children: "A Boy to night at least. J charge yo<sup>u</sup> looke to't or J'll renounce yo<sup>u</sup> for industrious Subiects."<sup>18</sup> The way in which Middleton sets up the play links the "happy service" mentioned by Antonio in 218 with Sebastian's attempt to stop that service, and witchcraft. I.i ends on blatant sexual bantering, Antonio recognising the Duke's prowess or perhaps sexual reputation by saying, "you Grace speakes like a worthie, and tryde Soldier."<sup>19</sup> Within thirty lines we get Heccat's boast: "What yong-man can we wish to pleasure vs / but we enioy him in an Incubus ?"<sup>20</sup> Her boasting parallels the men's, yet allegedly her actions are reprehensible. This demonstrates the double-bind in which Isabella finds herself. Should she fail to conceive, she will be disloyal as subject and woman; should she demonstrate or develop sexual prowess, she will be unruly or mannish, a witch or whore. Antonio's prowess is not despised or indeed doubted--Florida is well-kept, but not a secret.

Like Francisca and the Duchess, Isabella does not speak again once the identity of her "true" husband is revealed. Hobby discusses the "silencing of the

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<sup>18</sup>I.i (219-20). Conception of boy-children also holds the key to loyalty and/or fealty, according to this speech.

<sup>19</sup>I.i (221). Sexual engagement serves the state again here.

<sup>20</sup>I.ii (256-57).

nightingale, or of the abused woman that she can represent."<sup>21</sup> Though only the Duchess is an obvious rape victim, the other women are silenced as well by the patriarchal belief structure in which they dwell. Hobby continues, "One of the marked features of male love poetry is the silence within it of the women it is supposedly addressed to: the woman is usually present as an object of desire, but not as a speaking subject."<sup>22</sup> Hobby's argument about poetry can be extended to drama. Once a woman has been established as a valid, "proper," orderly object of desire in a male-ordered or male-identified work, she loses her voice. Conversely, loss of her voice can make her into this desirable, orderly object. Francisca, the Duchess, and Isabella all fall into this category. So do Hermione and Paulina in The Winter's Tale.<sup>23</sup>

Florida is an interesting case. She is Antonio's absent mistress, whose delights he can always enjoy. She does not stay absent, however; nor can she quite be silenced as the other three can. At no point in the play is her occupation hidden; characters on several occasions draw attention to the fact that she is a whore and obviously so. However, by the end of the play, she has come to represent the only true lover in the play. She does not downplay her love for Antonio. She can bring him to the delights of climax when he is impotent with his wife--an indication of Hecate's finesse. Sebastian gets exactly what he asks for. And when, at the end, she hears of Antonio's death, she swoons clear away. More than that, she merits attention: "looke to yond light Mistris," cries the Governour in V.iii (2109). Though he continues, "It is a sight would grieve a modest eie / to see a Strumpetts- soule sinck into Passion, / for him that was the Husband of an other," still the fact that she is catered to and borne away,

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<sup>21</sup>Hobby 47.

<sup>22</sup>Hobby 47.

<sup>23</sup>Semele and Eumenides in Endimion provide a twist: Eumenides falls silent first, for he offers his tongue for hers, but both are silent after the marriage agreement, and it is significant that they are the first (because most vocal) court couple paired, and therefore ordered.



rather than ignored, as she might easily have been, accords her a certain dignity.<sup>24</sup> Within the patriarchy of the play, however, her swoon (which recalls Hermione's) makes her an object, desirable and, more importantly, passive and contained. She becomes a corpse-like perfection of the type that Valerie Traub identifies in Shakespeare.<sup>25</sup>

The Governour continues the speech which concerns Florida; its last line, however, "Yet all this cleeres not you," is addressed to Sebastian.<sup>26</sup> Quite clearly Florida's predicament reminds the Governour of Sebastian's--after all, he is in love with another man's wife, as Florida loves another woman's husband. This last parallel casts doubts again on Sebastian. At the beginning of the play, he drinks metaphorical life-blood and consorts with witches; at the end, he is linked with a whore. Though his subsequent revelation of identity allows a happy ending and the Governour allows that his Sebastian's and Isabella's mind are both "chast," some of this taint remains, especially when Sebastian allows that he was sorely tempted to take was he considered to be his by right.<sup>27</sup> "[T]hough it had byn offence small in me / to enjoy mine owne, J left her pure, and free," he says at V.iii (2136-37). His allegedly chaste mind encompasses the possibility of sexual violence and forced prison; and one should not forget that what restrained his actions was not a native chastity, but instead Hecate's spell. Sebastian has not progressed very far at all from I.ii, in which he prefigures Firestone's desire for Hecate's power. "J haue no spare time to feare thee," Sebastian informs the witch, "my horrors are so strong, and great already . . . J would J were read so-much in thy black powre. . . ." <sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>V.iii (2112-14).

<sup>25</sup>See Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare's Plays," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 215-38.

<sup>26</sup>V.iii (2115).

<sup>27</sup>V.iii (2140).

<sup>28</sup>I.ii (356-62).

Florida agrees to conspire with Sebastian in IV.ii; Florida, however, apparently suffers a change of heart, which can be seen to redeem her. Her action to some extent redeems Sebastian, who spends the latter half of the scene opining that he cannot deceive Isabella thus, but does not move to stop the deception. Likewise, he carries on deceiving her all that night, and curses Florida for leaving: "that Strumpet would be found, els she should goe / I curse the time now, J did eu'r make vse / of such a plague: Sin knowes not what it do's."<sup>29</sup> This speech is both damning and sexually ambiguous. Despite his disclaimer, Sebastian knows full well what he does and the morals thereof, and does not draw back. He acknowledges his own sin, even after claiming he cannot bear to maintain it; he also curses in what should be, if he is sincere, a speech of repentance or at least thanks that the betrayal of the pure love he was espousing not twenty lines previously has been averted. Making use of a strumpet, in its strictest sense, means enjoying her sexual favours. It is not at all clear that Sebastian did not do this. It would certainly account partially for his guilt, and Florida is, after all, a businesswoman in addition to a lover.

The agreement between the two adds to the conflation in the images of women, and it may be that Sebastian's reaction to Florida's bitterness is what turns her from the deal. "So 'tis our Trade," remarks Florida, "to sett Snares for other Women / 'cause we were once caught ourselues." Sebastian responds, "a sweet allusion: / Hell, and a whore it seemes are Partners then, / in one Ambition:"<sup>30</sup> Florida may back out of the partnership; Sebastian, however, perseveres.

At a certain level, therefore, Sebastian and not Florida is the whore of the play. Florida's very honesty about her occupation in some ways redeems her; Sebastian's secrecy condemns him. A key to the confusion in women's roles comes early in the play. Almachildes, a sort of Everyman in the play, by turns drunken and noble, lewd and withdrawn (whilst acknowledging his wenching tendencies, he makes

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<sup>29</sup>IV.ii (1666-68).

<sup>30</sup>IV.ii (1580-84).



no play for Amoretta in the final scene), decides to consult Hecate for a love-charm, forming the counterpoint to Sebastian's request to starve generation in Antonio.

Before he goes, he informs the audience,

J will to the Witches: they say they have Charmes, & Tricks to make a wench fall backwards, and lead a man herself to a Cuntry-house, some mile out of the Towne, like a Fire-drake: there be such whorson kind Girles, and such bawdy Witches, and J'll try conclusions.<sup>31</sup>

Women's charms, witches' charms, girls, women, whores and witches are all conflated and rolled into one in this speech. This not only gives the reader insight on the attitudes to women throughout the whole play, but again refines the light in which Sebastian, likened to spirits, whores, and witches, must be seen.

Caroline Lockett Cherry observes,

far from being superficial or anti-feminist, Middleton actually presents a rather complete and searching examination of the various roles society offered women, including the unorthodox ones; the traditional virtues and vices attributed to women contrasted with a more realistic recognition of the limitations of these stereotypes; the social and psychological factors influencing the behavior of women and giving rise to the familiar clichés about them; and the assorted problems which were the peculiar province of women in a male-dominated, materialistic society.<sup>32</sup>

But whilst most people will sympathise with the Duchess, and not the Duke, the viewpoint that prevails is precisely the male-dominated, materialistic, oppressive one which Cherry observes. Each woman in the play commits some sort of sexual indiscretion, even if it be the slight unruliness of referring to bed-behaviour on the open stage and in front of servants, as Isabella does. Theoretically, this sexual unruliness should present the main threat in the play, as the Duchess' plot threatens her "lawful" husband. As Jyotsna Singh notes,

The terms, "harlot," "whore," "strumpet," and "courtesan" recur frequently in various Renaissance discourses: in consistory court

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<sup>31</sup>I.i (149-55).

<sup>32</sup>Caroline Lockett Cherry, The Most Unvaluedst Purchase: Women in the Plays of Thomas Middleton (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache, 1973) vii-viii.

records, sermons, moral treatises, and literary texts. Typically . . . these labels are mobilized to suggest that if women's sexuality is not contained within holy wedlock, it emerges as "whoredom." And accompanying such moral prescriptions is the persistent distinction between an "honeste and innocente wyfe" and a "harlot."<sup>33</sup>

True to this observation, and as seen in various plays, especially Endimion, but to some extent The Winter's Tale as well, the "cure" for this is wedlock. In The Witch this can be extended, in Amoretta's case, to a different sort of domestic servitude. The two are directly compared in Amoretta's last speech (cited above). However, what Cherry sees as sympathy can also be described as diffusion. Unlike Lady Macbeth's actions, for example, the Duchess' generate no horror. One might frown on Francisca's actions, but only until Isabella's overbearing righteousness re-aligns sympathy on Francisca's side. Francisca is condemned, and restrained within marriage to Aberzanes and death, but is at best tragic, at worst pathetic and sullen.

Therefore, although the non-occult women in the play offer evidence of unruliness, the threat of this is displaced from them on to Heccat. Heccat offers the only instance of escape from the overwhelmingly male world. Her world is overwhelmingly female and powerful, and whilst her son resents this, he is powerless to change it. If he is not powerless to change it, he is afraid to do so in any case.

Heccat's sexuality is frank, open, illicit, and excessive. However, as a woman who does not figure in the actual action of the main plot, she is allowed her sexual urgings and cravings. Displaced from the main action, the main location, and the primary female characters discussed above, Heccat's sexuality can titillate or disgust without being in the way. Secondly, the nature of her excess makes the other women seem purer.

Middleton's Heccat does not do things by halves. Her power and her feelings do not lie hidden. Just as the crimes committed in the plot are domestic, so too are the causes for Heccat's maleficium. Heccat herself explains this in her first scene.

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<sup>33</sup>Jyotsna Singh, "The Interventions of History: Narratives of Sexuality," The Weyward Sisters, eds. Dymrna Callaghan, Lorraine Helms and Jyotsna Singh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 12.



Switching from ritual rhyme and song to "normal" speech, she says of her current objects,

They denide me often Flowre, Barme, and Milke  
 Goose - greaze, and Tar, when I nere hurt their Charmings,  
 their Brew-locks, Nor. [sic] their Batches, nor fore-spoake  
 any of their Breedings. Now J'll be - meete with 'em.  
 seaven of their yong Piggs, J'haue Be-witchd already  
 of the last Littor, nine Ducklyngs; thirteene Goselings, & a Hog:  
 fell lame last Sondag after Even-song too.  
 and mark . . . what Soape  
 each Milch-kine gives to th' Paile: J'll send those Snakes  
 shall milke'em all before hand: . . .<sup>34</sup>

Her motivations are no less obvious; she states, "'tis for the Love of mischeif J doe this. and that we ' are sworne to; the first oath we take."<sup>35</sup> Most witches, as the various treatises demonstrate, swear themselves (or are believed to swear themselves) first and foremost to the Devil. In putting these words into Hecate's mouth, Middleton seems to be trying again to distance the witch from "real" life: he de-values belief in the demonic forces of witchcraft by demoting the demonic pact to mere "mischeif." This agrees with what Robin Briggs observes in Witches and Neighbours: "[T]he laity often displayed no abhorrence for the demonic, treated witches as routine nuisances and cheerfully used professional magicians as sources of power."<sup>36</sup> Almachildes' behaviour would bear this out. However, Sebastian's repugnance when faced with the witches--only his great need spurs him on--would then have to underline a split in class in the play. The upper class, marked by refined instincts, such as shrinking from witchery and demonic behaviour (such as drinking from skulls), are divided from the lower class.<sup>37</sup> In this sense Almachildes is relegated to rustic, comic, or clown status. Despite Hecate's activities--and she does

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<sup>34</sup>I.ii (283-92).

<sup>35</sup>I.ii (422-23).

<sup>36</sup>Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbours (London: HarperCollins, 1996) 104.

<sup>37</sup>To a lesser extent this class division in opinion will be seen in Heywood's The Wise-woman of Hogsdon as well.

not conceal that she uses such things as human body parts in her unguents and salves, and so on--there is evidence that not only does Almachildes consult the witches during the play, but that he frequently has consulted them. They are his first thought when he has difficulties with Amoretta; he knows just what kind of gift to bring them. Moreover, his repeated company is implied when he says, "it workes by this time / or the Devill's in 't: J thinck: J'll neu'r trust Witch els / nor sup with 'em this Twelue moneth."<sup>38</sup>

It is possible to see Firestone, Heccat's son and lover, as a clown figure. This interpretation tempts the critic, for Firestone certainly seems to provide a running moral counterpoint during the witch scenes, and does engage in a fair amount of word-play. The Kistners allege that the "witches talk a good fight . . . but they are continually brought back to earth by the humorous undercutting of Firestone's quizzical commentaries."<sup>39</sup> However, closer examination of his behaviour and speeches does not bear this interpretation out.

Whereas Heccat apportions to each witch a specialism--Stadlin does storms and wrack; Hoppo commits domestic witchery, ensorcelling cattle and crops; Heccat herself prefers sexual charms--Firestone is only a factotum. He spends his life, it seems, fetching and carrying for three women who are all more powerful than he. His time will come; the first thing Hecate tells us about him is that "shalt haue all when J die," three years hence.<sup>40</sup> Although soon after this he mutters empty, wishful threats about ending her life that very night (319), neither this nor any other malicious wish bears fruit for him. And if Firestone is a moral voice, he is a very strange one. He may regard his mother as a "Devill" (483) (though this may also refer to the devil in a fox-skin that once amused Almachildes on a previous visit to Heccat), but he does not refrain from enjoying such fringe benefits as he can in his position. Before he has

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<sup>38</sup>II.ii (867-69).

<sup>39</sup>A.L and M.L. Kistner, Middleton's Tragic Themes (New York: Peter Lang, 1984) 80.

<sup>40</sup>I.ii (299).



been on stage for more than a minute or two he asks his mother to "give me leave to ramble a-broad to night, with the Night - Mare, for J haue a great mind to over-lay a fat- Parsons Daughter."<sup>41</sup> Though she complains that she will have noone to sleep with that night, except the cat, Hecate is a doting mother and grants his request.<sup>42</sup>

Firestone's alleged moralising is no more than jealousy. The text makes this abundantly clear. In III.iii, he mutters in undertone, "J would you would breake yo<sup>r</sup> neck once, that J might haue all quickly" (1363-64). He desires Hecate's power; possibly more, but certainly no less. He bitterly resents the fact that she can travel abroad in the night to sexual indulgences and that he cannot; that she in effect controls and exploits his sexuality as the other men in the play control and exploit the other women's. He laces his speech at 1410-12 heavily with irony: "J thanck your kindnes: You must be gambolling i'th Aire; and leave me to walk here, like a Foole, and a Mortall." Clearly he thinks himself neither, and above both.<sup>43</sup>

Valerie Flint notes that, "Catullus had long seen the magus as the product of an illicit union of a mother with her son."<sup>44</sup> Whereas it is clear that Hecate has command of Latin and the classical texts or tropes (see below), it is less clear that Firestone has, for he stumbles over some of the occult names in III.iii, and though he puns in English, does not do so in Latin. His imperfect understanding may lead him

<sup>41</sup>I.ii (325-37).

<sup>42</sup>In this play, Middleton's attitude toward parenting is highly negative. Most of the characters are single; those who are not (mainly the Duke and Duchess) are childless. Francisca quite clearly does not want her child, and indeed leaves it behind in the country without a plaint. The whole act of begetting a child is thrown into a bad light when the villain/Duke, himself childless, claims Antonio and Isabella are bad subjects if they do not beget this first night. Ironically, this makes Heccat the only good mother in the play, which introduces all manner of complications to the theory that demonic English witches are viewed as distorted mothers.

<sup>43</sup>These are the words upon which the act ends. The next person we see is Almachildes, previously portrayed as just such a fool and mortal (and one whom Heccat has slept with thrice in incubus). However, though he acknowledges himself somewhat distracted, he does advance himself in this act, implying that rather than a layabout, he is in fact a "formall Student" (1420); he protests he knows "a Bawd, from an Aquavite-shop, a Strumpet from Wild-fire" (1423-24). He sees through the Duchess here (though he cannot tell a bawd from a duchess).

<sup>44</sup>Valerie I.J. Flint, The Rise of Magic In Early Medieval Europe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 17.

to believe that he is an inherent magus, though by Catullan reckoning it should be his son. Though Firestone at the last reckons that Hecate's song is a "Tune of dampnation" which "hath a villanous Burthen," these phrases, taken in the light of his previous practice (which he has done nothing to renounce), do not carry as much weight as they could. His is filial resentment kept in check by fear, lust, and a very accurate sense of Hecate's efficacy. He never doubts she can do what she claims; he has seen her (and helped her to) commit her various acts. As his voice ends two acts (I and III), it must have some accuracy.<sup>45</sup> When in I.ii Firestone asks, "how apt, and ready is a Drunckard now to Reelee to the Deuill? well. J'll even Jn, and see how he eates, and J'll be hanged if J be not the fatter of the twaine with laughing at him," he is undercutting not Heccat, but Almachildes.<sup>46</sup> Though Middleton may use Almachildes and Firestone to distance Heccat or render her ridiculous with "quizzical commentaries" in mid-scene, he does not at the end. Act I, Act III, and V.iii, the three witch scenes, end on somber and sobering notes. The witches are also used indirectly to set up Act IV: the Duchess determines to "take some Witches Councell, for his [Almachildes] end / That wilbe sur'st. (Mischeif is Mischeiffes frend.)"<sup>47</sup> The tune may be damning and "dampnable," but it works.

Hecate works by means of what she terms her ill spirits. When Sebastian enters, not only Heccat's love of mischief but her respect for his bearing and fearlessness convince her to help him. "[T]hy Boldnes takes me bravely," she states, continuing, "We're all sworne to sweatt for such a Spirit."<sup>48</sup> Just as Sebastian is a whore, so too is he lightly paralleled with one of the witches' spirits.

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<sup>45</sup>Act II is ended by Aberzanes; IV by Antonio; V by the Duke, in a typical trick of ending the play on the dominant view/voice. However, all five acts are ended by men who have committed atrocities.

<sup>46</sup>I.ii (483-86).

<sup>47</sup>IV.i (1517-18).

<sup>48</sup>I.ii (364-65).



In English witches, these spirits are reckoned demons or (demonic) familiars. In traditional and medieval magic, derived from Greco-Roman thought, these spirits are not demons--or are only inasmuch as the spirits of the dead are demons. Richard Kieckhefer, in Magic and the Middle Ages, observes that the medieval term demonologist referred to one who conversed the spirits of the dead, and was mostly synonymous with "necromancer."<sup>49</sup> Heccat's spirits are a cross between the two, and then again something extra. She speaks of "Black Spiritts, and white: Red Spiritts, and Gray" (2034), implying that her practice is not limited to one type, or perhaps realm, of magic. She then goes on to name them, by names which sound very much like the familiars' names one comes to know by reading the transcripts and accounts of trials: "Titty, Tiffin: keepe it stiff in / Fire-Drake, Puckey, make it Luckey. / Liand, Robin, you must bob in . . . " goes the chant at 2036-38. Her spirits tend to come in animal form. They do not nurse Hecate as familiars do (though a bat is reported to have supped at Stadlin's "lipps" at 1326), but she treats them as a Classical witch might do:

My Spiritts know their Moments,  
 Rauē, or Screich-owle never fly by th'dore  
 but they call-in (J thanck 'em;) and they loose not by't  
 J give 'em Barley, soakd in Infants - Blood  
 they shall haue Semina, cum Sanguine  
 their gorge crambd full, if they come once to o<sup>r</sup> house.  
 we are no Niggard.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the last two lines of this speech again place witchcraft in the realm of the domestic. Heccat has a sense of hospitality, be her guests natural (like Almachildes) or un- or supernatural. She herself is not guilty of the crimes which move her to vengeance when first we see her (discussed above).

She uses herbs in her concoctions as well, echoing both the wise-woman and the more occult powers of Medea, Circe, and Lucan's Erictho. Animal parts, familiar

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<sup>49</sup>Kieckhefer, Richard. Magic in the Middle Ages. 1990. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, passim.

<sup>50</sup>V.iii (2011-17).

to all forms of "historical" magic, show up as lizards' brains, juice of toad, etc.<sup>51</sup> Finally, and with as much or little emphasis as the rest, Heccat orders, "fetch three ounces of the red-haired-Girle / J killd last midnight."<sup>52</sup> To Firestone's query of which bit, she answers "Hip: Hip, or Flanck."<sup>53</sup> Like the request to the spirits to keep it "stiff in," this can bear sexual overtones, more probable when one considers the nature of the acts of which she claims to be mistress.

Heccat's literary antecedents are most obvious in V.3, when she starts reciting Latin to the Duchess, whom she dubs "daughter." She then translates it for the Duchess (and the audience):

Cum Volui ripis ipsis mirantibus Amnes,  
in Fontes rediere suos, concussa; sisto,  
Stantia Concutio, Cantu Freta Nubila Pello,  
Nubilasq; induco, Ventos, Abigoq; Vocoq;  
Viperias rumpo Verbis, et Carmine fauces,  
Et Siluas moueo, Jubeosq; tremiscere Montes  
Et mugire Solum, Manes-q; exire Sepulchris.

Teq; Luna traho. Can you doubt me then daughter?  
 That can make Mountaines tremble, Miles of woods walk  
 whole Earthes Foundation bellow, and the Spiritts  
 of the entombd, to burst-out from their Marbles;  
 nay, draw yond Moone, to my envolu'd Designes?<sup>54</sup>

Most telling of all this recitation is the last--"Luna traho." This, along with her avowal that "we show Reverence to yond peeping Moone," and of course her name, grounds her firmly in the Classical tradition of Circe, Medea, and the Thessalian witches.<sup>55</sup> It raises her into the realm of "high" culture (like the Duchess) and "high" magic, and grants her more than just a local or localised meaning.

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<sup>51</sup>No dung is used, which turns up frequently in the manuscripts and spells which have come down to us, and which Middleton could have used to render the scenes either more foetid or more Rabelaisian.

<sup>52</sup>V.iii (2027-28).

<sup>53</sup>V.iii (2030).

<sup>54</sup>V.iii (1989-2000). Prospero's famous speech usurps just this female power.

<sup>55</sup>For more on Thessalian witches, see chapter 3.



Ovid, in Book XIV of the Metamorphoses, describes Circe as "worshiping her mysterious gods with incantations equally mysterious by means of which she used to dim the face of the snowy moon, and draw a veil of thirsty clouds across her father's orb."<sup>56</sup> Natale Conti, in his Mythologies, states that,

The ancients credited the magical arts with even the power to transfer whole glades and standing fields, bring the dead back to life, and make stones rumble, as Ovid describes in Book 14 of his Metamorphoses (when writing on Circe's power this way):

Woods, hard to believe, leaped from their place,  
The ground began to groan, trees turn pale,  
The grass staining with clots of blood,  
Stones seemingly to rasp, moan,  
Dogs barking, on the ground squirming black snakes,  
Above, thin shades of souls flying silently.

And Ovid writes in a similar vein regarding Medea in his "Epistle of Hypsipyle":

She strives to bring down the reluctant moon  
from its course and hides the sun's horses  
In shadows. She restrains the waters  
And stays the crooked river. She moves trees  
From their place and stirs rocks with life.<sup>57</sup>

Conti was readily available in both the original and translation before and during Middleton's time. In Critical Imagery: the Role of the Pagan in the Caroline Masque, I discussed how William Browne's Circe in Circe and Ulisses: the Inner Temple Masque adhered both to this image and the Renaissance belief that those who were transformed in Circe's presence became so through their own folly, not through her malice.<sup>58</sup> The Syren's description of Circe fits those just given; I also noted how closely Prospero's claims to power follow this pattern, though he cannot draw down the moon.

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<sup>56</sup>Mary M. Innes, trans., The Metamorphoses of Ovid (London: Penguin, 1955) 321.

<sup>57</sup>Anthony DiMatteo, Natale Conti's Mythologies: A Select Translation (New York: Garland, 1994) 328.

<sup>58</sup>M.A. diss., U of Wales Bangor, 1994. More on Prospero usurping Circean imagery and power can also be found therein.

In this sense Heccat belongs to a classical and learned audience, one which is aware of literary antecedents. That audience would also be aware that although most known magical practitioners and occult philosophers were and are male, Circe and Medea remained by far the most potent figures in the tradition. That audience would also be familiar with the common practice of bandying Latin about in plays-- Holofernes in Love's Labours Lost, the pages in Mother Bombie, Sir Tophas in Endimion, and Sir Boniface in The Wise-woman of Hogsdon being cases in point. A difference that Middleton introduces is in the effect produced by the Latin. In the aforementioned plays, Latin serves to showcase wit or show up lack of wit. Though Firestone manages a quip after Heccat's monologue, which distances it slightly, Heccat's Latin oration serves effectively to silence and cow the Duchess. The Duchess may be aware that Heccat, by placing herself beyond local, insular boundaries (of intellect, time, place), transcends any way in which the Duchess, her husband, or any character in the play can influence or curb the witch. Another aspect which differs is the fact that a woman uses Latin, not a man. Of course, Hecate is the ultimate in unashamedly unruly women, so one may claim that her appropriation of what "should be" a man's tongue and speech increases her horror factor. In this interpretation, the Duchess would be cowed by the actual use of Latin as much as by the force and emotion in the speech. The irony here lies in the fact that Hecate is spouting received (male, literary) scholarship and opinion on a woman's sphere and influence. Then again, Hecate's use of Latin could be read as criticism of the men in the play, who are grounded firmly and only in desire, whatever role they hold in society, or of scholars in general.

This use of Latin would seem to support Anne Lancashire's claim that The Witch is a court play.<sup>59</sup> She believes that The Witch is a direct reflection of the Essex divorce case. She constructs The Witch as a masque, with masque virtues conquering

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<sup>59</sup>Anne Lancashire, "The Witch: Stage Flop or Political Mistake?", Kenneth Friedman, ed., Accompaning the Players (New York: AMS P, 1983) 161-81.



anti-masque vice. True to this conception, she sees in Middleton's play a direct mirror of the court and court happenings, as the following excerpt shows:

As the court is mirrored in the masque, participates in the masque, and is ultimately vindicated and exalted in the masque as providing true social order and beauty, so in The Witch the seemingly culpable and disorderly who as fictional creations mirror (the public perception of) members of the courtly audience (Isabella--Frances Howard, the Lord Governor--Northampton and/or the king) become in the end truly perceived in their "real" identities as virtuous and order-creating. . . .Fiction is redeemed by life; and life is truly perceived through fiction.<sup>60</sup>

Lancashire notes that the Essex divorce case was just as much discussed in both court and country as the Overbury case (which other critics claim inspired the play), and observes that, "in 1613 [a probable date of composition for The Witch] witchcraft both was a major issue and was focused--as in The Witch-- on unconsummated marriage and on limited impotence."<sup>61</sup> As far as court politics go, this is true, but it loses sight of the other issues associated with witchcraft, most specifically the broader range of domesticity and domestic maleficium which Middleton is careful to introduce into his play.

Certainly the songs or charms--what Barber dismissively calls "musical comedy" and "jigging verses"--can be seen in an anti-masque light.<sup>62</sup> In constructing the play as a masque, Lancashire states, "The Witch thus becomes in part a court play in the tradition of John Lyly's court comedies: a play in part dependent, for its full realization, on our perception of the extent to which it reflects, acts upon, and is acted upon by the world of the court."<sup>63</sup> In reading this, the emphasis must lie upon the words "in part." The traditional split between "good, heroic" masque virtues and "dark, bad" anti-masque vices simply does not exist. Sebastian traduces it most

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<sup>60</sup>Lancashire 171.

<sup>61</sup>Lancashire 166.

<sup>62</sup>Barber 26.

<sup>63</sup>Lancashire 171.

continuously, but the "good" Duke does as well, with no true reformation or come-uppance. Francisca starts on the boundary between the two, and arguments can be made for her ending the play on either side. And so on. The play is not a comedy, though it may have its lighter moments. The above discussion indicates that although the ending is neat and clean--no bodies on stage, no ends left unravelled--accepting it as a "happy ever after" is naive. Furthermore, though Heccat is a dark and powerful entity in a classical tradition, both she and Middleton do not ignore her earthier, more rustic aspects.

This is most obviously seen in her first encounter with Sebastian, where Heccat operates much as any cunning woman might do. When Sebastian cannot find the voice to confess his desires, Heccat sets about "divining" his purpose. First she runs through a list of Hoppo's and Stadlin's powers, wrack and ruin. When Sebastian denies he has need of these, the following interchange takes place:

HEC. is yt to Starve-vp Generation?  
to strike a Barrennes in Man, or Woman?  
SEB. hah?  
HEC. hah? did yo<sup>u</sup> feele me there? J knew Your Greife  
SEB. Can there be such things don?<sup>64</sup>

She relies on Sebastian's verbal and body language to find her ground, and having found it claims and persuades that she knew it all along. Accounts of cunning women, astrologers, and the like abound with such admissions. One leads a client by questioning into admitting a previous suspicion, and reinforces it. The wisewoman of Hogsdon hides so as to overhear her clients' business; Heccat merely ferrets it out.

Heccat is hedged about by vows; her devotion to Mischeif has already been discussed, as has her oath to serve the bold. These vows may not be contravened. She may cause love or its seeming, but she may not sever what heaven has joined, as she tells Sebastian at 411-12 (an instance in which Sebastian's desires go further than Heccat's). She can starve generation, and she can inspire arguments which may lead

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<sup>64</sup>I.ii (388-92).



to the pair's disjuncture. In this she serves the function of a catalyst, much as Renaissance Circe does for her beasts. Despite the fact that the threads of English witch, cunning woman, and Circean enchantress spool together in Heccat, she ends the play in her role as both catalyst and behind-the-scenes framer of actions. We last see her in her Circean splendour, reverencing the moon; and the last act requires that one re-think the structure of the action in the play.

Middleton carefully demonstrates Heccat's power. The charms she grants to both Sebastian and Almachildes work well, and she flies off the stage at one point, testifying that her charms also work on her own behalf. Yet it is not Almachildes who dies, as the Duchess requests, but the adulterous Antonio. Several reasons present themselves for this, but all of them require Heccat making value judgments about the goings-on and acting accordingly, bringing the play to a resolution (happy or not).

Heccat has a fondness for Almachildes. He is one of her favourite lovers and a persistent client/guest. In addition, the request for his death comes from a woman--the only woman to consult a witch in the play. It may be that the men's requests count for more than a woman's. This introduces many interpretative dilemmas. It certainly would be in keeping with the ruling tone/voice of the play, but it wreaks havoc with the belief, espoused in critical theory most vocally by Deborah Willis, that witchcraft was a predominantly female affair, in which women consulted and accused women. It does adhere to the classical pattern in which a man consults the witch/enchantress; it also introduces deceit into Heccat's character, which is ironically not in keeping. Heccat does not hide things from her clients and audience; unhidden excess is her norm. This interpretation requires that only men who frequent the unruly space inhabited by Heccat will prosper--which again throws us back to reinforcing women in domestic roles, which Heccat herself both does and does not fill.

Alternatively, Sebastian was the first to consult Hecate and explain his desires. She admires his spirit. The plot resolution is the best possible scenario for Sebastian,

and thus Heccat could be said to be ordering events for Sebastian on a "first-come, first-served" basis.

Thirdly, Heccat, who flies around the entire countryside so that "Whole Prouinces / appeare to our sight, ev'n leeke / a russet-Moale, vpon some ladies cheeke," may be aware that Almachildes' death will not serve the Duchess' purpose. Her husband is alive, and branding herself a murderess will not help her.<sup>65</sup> Unlike Florida and Francisca, who state their purpose to entrap women into their state, Hecate does not proselytise or recruit during the play, and shows no interest in creating the Duchess' downfall. This ironically raises her onto a sort of moral high ground, from which she can look down to Antonio's misdemeanour. Antonio's death will distress only Florida, and does provide a resolution. Though Antonio falls to his death instead of wasting away, Heccat has testified to her power for accident, and never specifies what sort of instant death she had in mind for Almachildes.

In any of these scenarios, Heccat's power catalyses the action; in the last instance, her decision either not to use or to re-route her power definitely shapes the play's end. This lifts her above the typical English witch to a level almost of Mother Bombie, though Heccat's role is interactive as opposed to Sibylline, and as such can be compared with the machinations of the wisewoman of Hogsdon, though that worthy has not the literariness of Heccat. Her role, as well as her identity, is composite.

This does not de-value her, however, or lessen her effect upon characters or audience. It does testify to the amount of external fashioning placed upon Renaissance and early modern witches. In The Witch of Edmonton, Mother Sawyer recognises that her fellow villagers are forcibly making her into a witch, and eventually takes possession of the identity they have created for her. Heccat occupies with relish a role pre-fashioned by the playwright. That this role is effective is testified to not only by the fact that the witch scenes were imported to post-

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<sup>65</sup>I.ii (250-52).



Shakespearean productions of Macbeth (in which, as discussed in that chapter, the witches hang above the action and frame the cycle of the play), but also by the tendency of critics to dismiss her as derivative. By introducing Heccat and her ilk to an Italianate drama, and then creating discomfiting and incontrovertible links between the two areas, Middleton creates a play which can unsettle an audience without its precisely acknowledging why.<sup>66</sup> This dis-ease means that the allegedly happy ending provokes dissatisfaction in readers or audience. Dissatisfaction leads to the play being discounted as over-contrived or hollow. It is not that the play (and the witch) have no identity on their own; merely that the overall identities, of characters and play, are intertwined so that any resolution will be a false one, leading to confrontational and distressing thoughts. The Duke's voice conquers, but his words "And in all Times, may this Daie euer proue / a Daie of Triumph, Joie, and honest Loue" betray their emptiness.

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<sup>66</sup> The importance here is not the exact genre of the play, but the intrusion on to a recognised, commonplace scene by the unsettling figure of the witch. This method would work with any genre where the boundaries are allegedly set firmly and recognised as such by reader or audience.

CHAPTER 10. LYLY'S MOTHER BOMBIE: TRUTH BEGETS MANY CHILDREN

In Lyly's play of the same name, written in 1590/91, *Mother Bombie* presents the audience with a very different type of occult character than hitherto encountered.<sup>1</sup> She is practical, rooted in every-day life, and enacts no magic *per se*. Rather than using spells like Dipsas, or rituals like Shakespeare's Duchess of Gloucester, she works by using her knowledge of people and, specifically, the rest of the cast to present her version of the truth. Her version is, as the audience comes to realise, the real truth. The dramatis personae calls Mother Bombie "a Fortune-teller."<sup>2</sup> The characters call her, in the main, a cunning woman, and this is the only title she will accept. When Silena claims, "They saie you are a witch," Mother Bombie replies, "They lie, I am a cunning woman."<sup>3</sup> In *Mother Bombie* we do not have a witch along the lines of Duessa, Dipsas, or Hecate, but there is a certain Sibylline resonance, reinforced by a brief Circean reference, which differentiates her from a "cut-and-dry" cunning woman, such as Thomas Heywood's *Wise-woman of Hogsdon* in the play of the same name, probably composed in 1604.<sup>4</sup>

A cunning woman (or man) is of a different order to the witch. She has no claims to occult or supernatural powers; there is no question of a diabolic pact; she is altogether more practical and generally perceived as less threatening than a witch. The line can become blurred--a cunning woman can be deemed a "white witch." Robin Briggs describes a Lorraine cunning person as follows, and the example holds true for English cunning folk as well:

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<sup>1</sup>John Lyly, *Mother Bombie*, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902) 163-228. All references to this edition. Hereafter Bombie in notes.

<sup>2</sup>Bombie 172.

<sup>3</sup>II.iii.86-87.

<sup>4</sup>Michael H. Leonard, *A Critical Edition of Thomas Heywood's A Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (London: Garland, 1980). All references to this edition.



The cunning folk had no interest in promoting formal persecutions, which endangered their own position, and were anxious to preserve confidentiality. They were cautious in naming suspects, exploiting techniques which persuaded the client to make his or her own suspicions explicit. It was common for them to provide a range of services, including love magic, the recovery of stolen goods, information about missing persons, the prediction of lottery numbers and searches for buried treasure. In several of these areas it is easy to see how the giving of advice could itself be effectual, enabling the client to take decisions with greater confidence or frightening others into remedial action.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas sections of Mother Bombie, such as the missing spoon episode with Rixula, adhere to this description, others do not. Mother Bombie does, however, fulfill every action of Serena's speech in III.i: "They say there is hard by an old cunning woman, who can tell fortunes, expound dreames, tell of things that be lost, and deuine of accidents to come."<sup>6</sup> Whereas the Wise-woman of Hogsdon clearly connives with her assistant, engages in all manner of trickery, and quite literally drives the action of her play, Mother Bombie keeps her distance from both characters and plot. There is an abstraction, an almost dreamy quality to her "prophecies" (uttered, unlike her speech, in verse) which one does not expect in a rustic.<sup>7</sup> Unlike a cunning-woman, she can interpret dreams or dream-visions. She makes sense out of nonsense. More than a rustic, she is a benevolent Sibyl-figure who spurs characters to reveal what they do not know that they know.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbours (London: Harper, 1996) 179-80.

<sup>6</sup>25-27.

<sup>7</sup>Though there are songs in the play, there are no other instances of verse speaking. This also sets Mother Bombie apart from the rest of the characters.

<sup>8</sup>All of the characters are rustics in the sense that they are very far removed from the court and courtiers of Endimion. Though Mother Bombie is called the good woman of Rochester, and Memphio in I.i talks of sending his wife down to a country house, in I.ii Stellio complicates the picture, divorcing himself from courtly and city behaviour: "I like not solemne woing, it is for courtiers ; let countrie folkes beleue others reports as much as their own opinions" (36-38). In I.iii., Prisius and Sperantus unknowingly bear out Stellio's analysis of country folk by believing others' reports rather than forming an opinion themselves. In addition, it would be very difficult to isolate Accius and Silena so completely in a teeming urban location. It makes sense to place the action at least some little way out of the main town. The only two places actively defined in the play are Mother Bombie's house, which is rapped upon, and to a lesser extent the tavern, discussed but not seen on stage. The tavern is a place for

This sits somewhat at odds with what critics have to say about the play. G.K. Hunter believes that Mother Bombie fits solidly into an uncourtly genre, with its very real sense of place very far from Cynthia's pastoral court in Endimion.<sup>9</sup> He dubs the play, "a formal imitation of the order, regularity, neatness, and clarity of the Terentian mode in comedy."<sup>10</sup> Yet this order and regularity is of a "low" order. Hunter implies that Mother Bombie is a shallow play, "without opportunity for spectacle . . . without the beauties of mythology [even Christian mythology]; there is no hint of allegory; pastoral grace is absent."<sup>11</sup> In Hunter's opinion, the play revolves around wit and the manifestation of wit. He implies that Mother Bombie does not fit into this scheme (which is not precisely true, as will be shown), and Lyly superimposes her upon the wordplay and shallow characters to add another, greater dimension to the work:

Lyly, feeling the shallowness of a plot where wit is so much in the ascendant, and characters so much in control of themselves, sought to give the dimension of mystery and misunderstanding to his play (it was not a dimension he was accustomed to doing without) by means of a prophetess, in whose mind the whole action may be supposed to take place.<sup>12</sup>

Contradictions abound here. According to Hunter, there is no mythology, yet Mother Bombie supplies one as a prophetess; the play is an imitation of order, where the order has been upset before the play even begins; Lyly's real sense of place is backed up by a real cunning woman, who is not a real cunning woman at all but a prophetess; there is no allegory or grace, yet the entire action takes place in Mother Bombie's mind (which also traduces a "real" location).

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meeting and mingling; Mother Bombie's house a place apart, which the characters seek out in order to supplicate, to find answers instead of drowning them. The separateness sets Mother Bombie's place up in opposition to the communal space of the tavern, and, so doing, underlines her Sibylline quality, as one whom people must seek out.

<sup>9</sup>G.K. Hunter, John Lyly (London: Routledge, 1962). 224.

<sup>10</sup>Hunter 220.

<sup>11</sup>Hunter 229.

<sup>12</sup>Hunter 223, emphasis mine.



These apparent contradictions can be resolved by allowing that Mother Bombie is indeed an amalgamation of courtly and uncourtly traditions. She is not a witch, but a prophetess; one who, like the Sibyl or Pythonesses, reveals but does not enact. But since she has been superimposed on a rustic setting (and the impression the audience receives of her is that she has dwelt in the countryside for many years), she accumulates some of the reputation of her country cousin, the cunning woman. Her occupation, however, is a pass-time, as she observes in II.iii. "[I]n the mean season I will professe cunning for all commers," states Mother Bombie at line 101. Her purpose is to frame the action--the rest of the play, with its confusions and reverses, is the "mean season" before the true end.

In addition, the varied reactions to Mother Bombie within the play reinforce just such an uncertainty, or paradox. In V.iii., three rapidly contrasting views are voiced, by Silena, Dromio, and Riscio, respectively: "a bots on Mother Bomby!"; "wel fare Mother Bomby!" and "beware of Mother Bomby!" These reactions to the woman are exactly the reactions the characters have to the home truths--Silena cannot bear (or perhaps understand) her inconvenience. Dromio can appreciate a job or saying well done. Riscio, however, who is the only member of the party not to consult Mother Bombie on his own behalf (he asks only about a joint enterprise), has the most wit of all, for he can recognise the danger of the truth. For the audience, the play has a happy ending. For the characters in the play, however, and especially for the wits, who are used to ruling the action, the play ends with all order being reversed, with normality being inverted and the fantastic becoming real. If Truth is the daughter of Time, then Riscio sees her as a potentially unruly woman.

Diane Purkiss reveals another level of meaning in her theory that Mother Bombie owes almost everything to Endimion. She writes,

Mother Bombie is almost a rude rewriting of Endimion, where Cynthia is deliberately and defiantly conflated with the cunning woman. . . . While in Endimion it is Cynthia who takes control of the narrative, putting Dipsas in her proper place as a married woman, in the later play her role as unraveler of the plot is handed over to the

witch. It is Mother Bombie who knows best, and who orders events justly.<sup>13</sup>

Purkiss theorises that the difference in the two plays is due to change in Lyly's circumstances; at the time of Endimion, he hoped for patronage from Elizabeth I. By the time of Mother Bombie, he had lost that hope.<sup>14</sup> However, Mother Bombie may know best, but she does not order events justly. At best she is a catalyst for the *dénouement* of the play, encouraging Vicinia to reveal her secret.

Her encouragement, like her "prophecies," is couched in oblique verse. However, Vicinia understands it, aided by her guilty conscience and the inherent cunning that allowed her to make her plot in the first place. Native wit and verbal facility play as defining a role in Mother Bombie as in the other plays under study. As a play on wit, much is made of foolery. Whereas Memphio's son is held to be a natural fool (i.e., a fool from conception onwards), Silena is no natural fool, but a made one. In each case, however, the source of the simplicity is held to be female. Dromio theorises that the reason for Accius' simplicity is a mother's intellectual capacity. Memphio's wife is held to be "fantasticall of her mind; and it may be, when this boy was begotten shee thought of a foole, & so conceiued a foole, your selfe beeing verie wise, and she surpassing honest."<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt that this is wit: if the woman is honest and bethought herself of a fool whilst making love, that fool must be her husband. But Dromio states that Memphio is very wise--in that case, to think of a fool whilst making love to her husband proves Memphio's wife dishonest. And, in the end, Accius' stupidity (as Silena's) is due to a woman. A dishonest woman, who switched her children at birth.

Stellio says of Silena that she is a self-fashioned fool. "Nay, Riscio, she is no natural foole," he opines, "but in this consisteth her simplicity, that she thinketh

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<sup>13</sup>Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (London: Routledge, 1996) 189.

<sup>14</sup>Purkiss 189.

<sup>15</sup>I.i.26-28.



herself subtle; in this her rudeness, that she imagines she is courtly; in this the overshooting of her selfe, that she overweeneth of her selfe."<sup>16</sup> At first reading this may seem innocent enough; but combined with the effect Silena has on men, it portrays a rather damning view of women. For Silena not only fancies herself (which makes her a fool); but is overwhelmingly beautiful. In an interesting switch and comment on courtly fashion, this makes her a witch. Her beauty is held to be bewitching (Candius himself calls her "enchanted" at II.iii.29), and this is evidenced by Candius' immediate captivation by her. This fascination lasts for precisely one conversation, as Candius cannot believe a fair face can hide a simple mind. Eventually, he is reasoned out of his brief infatuation by incontrovertible evidence of Silena's simplicity.

Several attitudes are encoded in this brief scene. One is that the outside reflects the inner self--a common enough medieval and early modern belief. But in Mother Bombie it is only brought to bear against Silena, not against Accius or any other of the lovers. In her case, the outside does not represent the in. Nothing in Mother Bombie, for a woman, can designate what lies inside. And it is her speech that betrays her, just as her false wisdom makes her a fool--and just as Semele's speech makes her a shrew in Endimion. Lyly does, however, give his reader a worthy woman. Mother Bombie is Silena's exact opposite. Maestius calls Mother Bombie "the beldam, for her face, and yeeres, and attire," yet Mother Bombie's speech proves her to be as witty as the pages, and wiser than the rest of the cast.<sup>17</sup>

Implied in the interchange between Candius and Silena is the thrall in which women, especially women who deem themselves courtly or polished, can hold men. In Endimion, this thrall is explicit, and is a driving-force behind the plot. To be in love with Cynthia is extreme, but commendable. But in Mother Bombie, even clever men are taken in, at least for a time. Love with courtly women is a scam, and of

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<sup>16</sup>I.ii.21-24.

<sup>17</sup>III.i.34-5.

literally little moment. Despite his "true" love of Livia, and his admonition to himself that "if thou begin to slip at beautie on a sodaine, thou wilt surfet with carousing it at the last," within five lines Candius has slipped.<sup>18</sup> "[I]f shee seeme coy, Ile practise all the arte of loue, if I <finde> her coming, all the pleasures of loue," he swoons.<sup>19</sup> So much for the true lovers we find in Endimion. Women's enchanting beauty sweeps them aside here.

Maestius and Serena are the star-crossed true lovers in Mother Bombie. They do not falter, but they are rarely seen, most probably because in their protestations of love and virtue they are neither witty nor interesting. Serena herself proves fickle of opinion: convinced at the beginning that Mother Bombie is "the good woman, who yet neuer did hurt," she hurls the epithet "weather-beate[n] witch" as soon as Mother Bombie voices her and Maestius' desire and predicts its fulfillment.<sup>20</sup> It could be said that Serena's reaction is the reaction of the teased; but it is actually a reaction against having her secret spoken. The violence of her reaction alone speaks to that, as does her choice of vocabulary. Like Guyon in the Bowre of Bliss, whose violence overcompensates for the attraction he feels, Serena's words betray the fear, passion, and lack of serenity within her. Deborah Willis, along with others, has noted the vitriol with which neighbouring women could turn on each other, especially if one were seen to have an (uncanny) advantage.<sup>21</sup> This is that scenario in microcosm--virtue turned to vitriol.

Maestius does not undergo any transition. He disbelieves Mother Bombie's reputation from the outset; content with Serena's re-reading of the situation, he manages to take the high road morally, though he labours under the same desires his alleged sister does. He comforts Serena, condescendingly telling her to "learne of me

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<sup>18</sup>II.iii.9-10.

<sup>19</sup>II.iii.14-15.

<sup>20</sup>III.i.27-28; 50.

<sup>21</sup>Deborah Willis, Malevolent Nurture (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) passim.



hereafter, that these old sawes of such olde hags, are but false fires to leade one out of a plaine path into a deep pit."<sup>22</sup> Superstition is quite literally an old wives' tale, a fairy will-o'-wisp; solid male reasoning, like Candius', will see the lovers true.<sup>23</sup>

Candius wants to suspend his disbelief and accept Silena as a virtuous, fair and clever maid. Only after repeated imbecilities does he, by dint of his greater reason, win free. If Silena were not as extreme a case as she is, Candius would have remained under her spell.

Rather like Mother Sawyer's "painted things in Princes Courts / Upon whose Eye-lids Lust sits blowing fires / To burn Mens Souls in sensual hot desires" in Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton, Silena is an unacknowledged witch.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Dekker extends his accusation of witchcraft to include most of the court, Lyly singles out women. Only Silena thinks herself "courtly" in this play. Men are allowed to trifle with wit; women's wit is a mere trifle. Conversely, women cause lack of wit, with their fashioning of self and conception of others. No female speech is held to be good or ennobling. Even Rixula, the shrewish maid admitted to the company of the wits, is careless--she is damned as a bad and scatterbrained housekeeper (though a virtuous woman), more willing to believe in others' treachery than her own lack of concentration. Her virtue is seconded to her over-riding characteristic, of slackness in her (domestic) calling. Again, the only exception to this devaluation of female speech is Mother Bombie. Mother Bombie's speech, though misunderstood and periodically badmouthed throughout the play, holds true and "good" throughout. This is all the more remarkable because there is no hint of an exterior inspiration for her, except

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<sup>22</sup>III.i.58-60.

<sup>23</sup>Serena quite literally does not speak again. Maestius in his words echoes Mother Bombie's--he and Serena are married by the blessing of parents, Nature, and Law--but unlike the wits and the fools, he does not admit Mother Bombie's foretelling was true. He does praise "fortune," but not the fortune-teller. (V.iii.316-341). He seems to feel that the wealth he and Serena are now to enjoy blesses the match, and that fortune is only that which can be spent.

<sup>24</sup>Etta Soiref Onat, ed. The Witch of Edmonton: A Critical Edition (London: Garland, 1980) IV.i.103-05.

when Serena casts aspersions on her character. Her power of prophecy or of right-speaking comes from within her.

Throughout the play emphasis is placed more on Mother Bombie's speech than her actions. When Serena encourages Maestius to consult Mother Bombie, because of the wondrous ability to "tell fortunes, expound dreames, tell of things that be lost, and deuine of accidents to come," and says the seer has "yet neuer did hurt," Maestius responds, "Nor anie good, I thinke, Serena; yet to satisfye thy minde we will see what she can saie."<sup>25</sup> Mother Bombie tells, expounds, and says. The phrase Maestius uses, "see what she can saie," supposes speech to be an action, or even a vision. He intends to give her a hearing, to hear what she has to say, or to see what she can do. The synaesthesia and mixing of phrase emphasises speech, making it tangible, or at least sensible.

After this speech, which does enact the wishes of the two lovers, Serena turns against Mother Bombie; but first, specifically, she denounces her speech: "These doggrell rimes and obscure words, comming out of the mouth of such a weather-beate[n] witch, are thought diuinations of some holy spirite, being but dreames of decayed braines; for mine owne parte, I would thou mightest sit on that stoole, till he & I marrie by lawe."<sup>26</sup>

Mother Bombie does not rise to this bait; or rather, responds as would any oracle--obliquely. "I saie Mother Bombie neuer speakes but once," she replies, "and yet neuer spake vntruth once."<sup>27</sup> Within the play, this is true. What is more, Mother Bombie keeps, as well as gives, counsel. When Mother Bombie speaks to Vicinia, Vicinia, knowing the truth, sees it reflected in Mother Bombie's words. "I understand thy meaning," says Vicinia, "and thou well knowest my practise."<sup>28</sup> To explain

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<sup>25</sup>III.i.25-30.

<sup>26</sup>III.i.49-53.

<sup>27</sup>III.i.54-55.

<sup>28</sup>V.ii.22-23.



Vicinia's reaction, one must assume Vicinia either confessed years ago to Mother Bombie, or Mother Bombie saw or fathomed the act of switching the children. Yet until the time is dramatically right and she is consulted by those most nearly concerned, she says nothing. This underlines her Sibylline nature and distance. True prophets may not warn--they speak when asked, as Oedipus found to his cost.

That Mother Bombie values speech is evident by her price: "I take no monie, but good words. Raile not if I tell true; if I doe not, reuenge."<sup>29</sup> She receives words and builds a reputation. Her reputation is important, as is the way it is perceived and published abroad. She refuses to be labeled a witch, aware (like the Wise-woman of Hogsdon) what the danger of being perceived as a witch is. A loose word or appellation could hang her. Good words, which contribute to the definition she gives herself and which cement people's positive opinion of her, are what she needs. Dissatisfied clients' ill words could lead to Mother Bombie's being exteriorly defined like Mother Sawyer. Similarly, if Mother Bombie herself speaks ill or foolishly, she would find herself like Silena, condemned by her own speech. Words are the premium weapon and means of exchange in the play, something which Maestius will never realise. The wits, however, do.

Mother Bombie shows herself to be no lack-wit, though she does not wrangle in half-Latin as the pages do. When Mother Bombie asks who first consults her, Silena responds, "One who would be a maide." The woman replies, "If thou be not, it is impossible thou shuldst be, and a shame thou art not." Likewise, she bandies the word *in/Inne*, with the pages.<sup>30</sup> However, she soon tires of the badinage, and replies with uncommon good sense to all of the pages' queries--and with no more than decent character knowledge would grant her.

The pages are more afraid of Mother Bombie's appearance than anyone else. Silena thinks Mother Bombie is foul, but that simply because she herself is fair, and

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<sup>29</sup>III.iii.182-83.

<sup>30</sup>II.iii.82-85; III.iv.84-85.

Mother Bombie no comparison. Maestius considers her a beldam, but his idea of women and women's knowledge has been demonstrated already. Being wits, the servants acknowledge what Mother Bombie's potential is. "Crosse your selues, looke how she lookes," cries Halfpenie. "Mark her not, sheele turne vs all to Apes," cries Dromio. This is a direct Circean reference. Were Mother Bombie a Circe, she could indeed expound dreams and the future, and turn them into apes. They having been aping others, and aping wit, throughout the play, and Circe in Renaissance imagery (as has been more thoroughly discussed elsewhere) turns people into what they truly are inside. Circe is an ambivalent character--a friendly monster. Mother Bombie herself underlines her ambivalence, or neutrality and distance, when she confronts the pages. Riscio says, "They say you are cunning, & are called the good woman of Rochester." Mother Bombie replies, "If neuer to doo harme, be to doo good, I dare saie I am not ill."<sup>31</sup>

Recognising, consciously or not, what Mother Bombie is and represents, the pages are more respectful to her than any other character or set of characters in the play. They consult her about personal fortunes, lost (or rather mislaid) spoons, and success of their joint venture. They do not contest either her reading of their characters or of the future, and are the only people to offer to reward her. And they do reward her with "good words" in the climax of it play--it is Lucio who acknowledges that the seer "foretolde all."<sup>32</sup> As mentioned before, Riscio takes the possibility of her words being true seriously enough not to question for himself, and especially not if her words do come true. When her words do not come true, he remains silent. He bids his friends beware her words, and when we see him at the end of the play, he is crossing verbal swords with the sergeant. Riscio, at least, can live without knowing his end.

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<sup>31</sup>III.iv.89-91.

<sup>32</sup>V.iii.329.



The curiosity of Mother Bombie's depiction lies in the fact that her speech and wisdom are the only unequivocally valued examples in the play. The pages may be wits, but they lack depth, and wisdom, and truth (again Mother Bombie's province) out-manoeuvres them. Her value cannot come merely from age and experience, for the fathers are all old men, worthy though they may be, and they are duped and deceived. Candius and Livia, in I.iii, mock old age and its alleged wisdom. They themselves demonstrate both wit and learning, yet Candius is still prey to a pretty face, and both Candius and Livia are to some degree disrespectful, and despite their cleverness require the pages' help to be married.

Without mythology, it becomes difficult otherwise to explain the phenomenon of a good and right-speaking woman who draws her goodness wholly from herself. Even when Serena insults Mother Bombie, she back-claims that her prophecies are allegedly the work, not of God, but of "some holy spirite." Certainly Lyly's plays as a whole rely heavily on the Classical, and it may be that in his effort to write a non-allegorical, down-to-life play, his classical instincts got the better of him, and he enhanced what would have been a simple cunning woman with some of the Sibylline tones he knew so well. The title itself certifies that Mother Bombie, and not any of the others, frames and forms the play.

Once her words have come true, they are remembered as actions.

Memphio eulogises her thus: "In deed she is cunning and wise, neuer doing harme, but still practising good."<sup>33</sup> If, as Hunter theorises, the action of the play takes place in Mother Bombie's mind, then that mind must be basically sound, for all wrongs are righted, and lovers, children, and parents reconciled. However, Hunter's hypothesis can be rephrased to state that Mother Bombie exists only in the characters' minds. Tellingly, she is the only character not on stage in the last scene, though she is

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<sup>33</sup>V.iii.330-31.

brought to mind.<sup>34</sup> Her words are in the past, yet her truths, which were once suppressed knowledge and desire, are the present and the future.

Like any catalyst, Mother Bombie brings about a reaction without truly becoming part of it. Like a Sibyl, she predicts and may guide, but does not intervene. She practises some of the arts of the cunning woman, but goes further. She remains a unique portrayal. Dekker's Mother Sawyer may come from a similar sort of setting, but she is a witch, complete with diabolic pact. The wise-woman of Hogsdon is a very typical example of a historical cunning woman, but she does not have the detachment. Heywood's play, however, with its wits, deceptions, marriages, and reverses, makes a good counterpoint to Mother Bombie.

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<sup>34</sup>Bond takes people's speeches as evidence that they enter, and provides entry cues appropriately. Rixula does not speak, and Bond therefore has no entry cue for her, but it is likely that she enters, as do all the other servants, with her master.



CHAPTER 11. AND ALL DOE WELL, ACCORDING TO THEIR TALENT: UNRULINESS AND ORDER IN THE WISE-WOMAN OF HOGSDON.

*Here were even a Plot to make a play on.*  
*-The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon, 986-87<sup>1</sup>*

Thomas Heywood's The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon (1604) presents us with a cunning woman rather than a witch; or rather, presents us with a series of cunning women who attempt to order the action and resolution in the play. Only the title character, however, presents us with a history of cunning and cozenage, and shows neither repentance nor inclination to alter her situation, status, or practice at the end of the play. In addition, The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon is a self-conscious work of art, in which the two most unruly characters--the Wise Woman and Chartley--are also those with the highest degree of self-awareness. Chartley frames the play, in the sense that he speaks both first and last; he informs it, in the sense that the action of the play is the path of his reclamation. He does not order it, though, being as transgressive as any of the women. Instead of representing the patriarchy, he takes on all the characteristics (bar gender) of the unruly woman. The threat this poses to social order and the order of the play can only be contained by marriage—again, a common fate of the unruly woman. He does not give voice to the patriarchy. He takes the place of the witch-figure in the text, one who works outside the system and must be brought back within it. His philandering may be seen as typically patriarchal, but as it directly threatens order, it must be seen as outside that order—as unruly. Order, not patriarchy, is the overarching concern of The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon. Patriarchy is present in the play, but not with the same virulence as in Middleton's

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<sup>1</sup>Michael H. Leonard, A Critical Edition of Thomas Heywood's The Wise Woman of Hogsdon (New York: Garland, 1980). Hereafter WWH. All references to this edition. Line numbers do not refresh with each scene.

The Witch. Its manifestation as a moral arbiter is both underscored and de-valued by the fact that its representative, Luce 2, is only outwardly male.

Of any class or type of characters in the texts under discussion in this study, the "immoral" charlatan shows perhaps the highest degree of self-awareness. Charlatans, from Autolycus in The Winter's Tale to Aberzanes in The Witch and Chartley and the Wise-woman in WWH, also demonstrate the most self-acceptance. None of them harbours any self-delusion; in fact, such characters often delight in explaining their motivations, tricks, and plots to the audience. Though they may be punished, as Aberzanes is, or shown up, as Chartley is, they rarely show any sign of remorse (Chartley is the exception). Lindsay Davies mentions the Wise-woman's "determination to remain a figure of transgression."<sup>2</sup> However, the Wise-woman does not believe that she is indeed transgressing. She acknowledges and demonstrates her chicanery, but places herself in a well-known (and therefore legitimate?) profession. Knowledge of this heritage refers not only to historical or actual lineage, but literary lineage as well, for in WWH, awareness extends to the fact that both Chartley and the Wise-woman refer to the conventions of the theatre and outside world.

Chartley mentions Heywood's play A Woman Kill'd with Kindness at 1205-06; Leonard observes that the Wise-woman's reference to "cutting Dicke" in 541 may also be a Heywood self-reference (108); in the play's last lines, Chartley tells the wise-woman that she shall "[b]eare . . . the name of all these comick acts."<sup>3</sup> The Wise-woman laughs, "Here were even a Plot to make a play on," at lines 986-87. The Wise-woman's stage-managing of the dénouement of the final act shows a fine awareness of showmanship.

The references to Heywood's other plays may well be viewed in the light of an advertisement, especially given one key speech of the Wise-woman's. At lines 425-

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<sup>2</sup>Lindsay Davies, "Neither Maids nor Wives in The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon," Place and Displacement in the Renaissance, ed. Alvin Vos (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 84.

<sup>3</sup>2326.



26, she acknowledges, "I thinke I can see as far into a Mill-stone as another."

Leonard glosses this as a claim to astuteness, but given the wise-woman's propensities to see and judge by what should be obvious (a talent which Second Luce shares), it may represent her different way of seeing--through the hole at the centre of the stone, whilst others try to see through its opacity. After this claim, she launches into a long list of her predecessors in her trade. Other texts' witches have used lists and names to invoke their demons and spirits; the Wise-woman does not. This list could not be mistaken for any kind of magical invocation, unless it be an invocation of legitimacy:

[Y]ou have heard of Mother Notingham, who for her time, was prettily skill'd in casting of Waters: and after her, Mother Bombye; and then there is one Hatfield in Pepper-Alley, hee doth prettie well for a thing that's lost. There's another in Coleharbour, that's skill'd in the Planets. Mother Sturton in Goulden-Lane, is for Forespeaking: Mother Phillips of the Banke-side, for the weakness of the backe: and then there's a very reverent Matron on Clarkenwell-Green, good at many things: Mistris Mary on the Banke-side, is for recting a Figure: and one (what do you call her) in Westminster, that practiseth the Booke and the Key, and the Sive and the Sheares: and all doe well, according to their talent. For my selfe, let the world speake. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Leonard glosses as many of these practitioners as he can. Mother Bombie he says is probably Lyly's, and may have originated in a woman of a similar name in Scot; he traces a reference to a Judith Phillips in 1595, and notes that Heywood himself lived in Clarkenwell, "a district notorious for its thieves and prostitutes."<sup>5</sup> He also furthers the notion that this is the woman to whom Heywood refers in Gunaikeion, where he "quotes her tale about witchcraft."<sup>6</sup>

Here is a comprehensive listing of cunning-folk, tellingly both male and female, and the various practices for which they were famed. Most of them have one specialism, for which their "talent" suits them. This list includes contemporaries both of the Wise-woman's and of Heywood's. This opens up a possibility hitherto

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<sup>4</sup>426-44.

<sup>5</sup>Leonard 98-99.

<sup>6</sup>Leonard 99.

undiscussed--that the mention of these cunning-folk, just like Chartley's mention of Heywood's previous play, is quite simply a form of advertisement. If a member of the audience wishes, after seeing the play, to consult a wise-woman, (s)he now knows where to find several, with differing approaches and specialities--including, most conveniently, the one whom, or at least of whom, Heywood must have known quite well, that "very reverent Matron . . . good at many things" who receives the warmest encomium in the recital. With this the case, the play becomes even more self-aware. It is a means, a medium for disseminating information of the most practical kind, and an unsubtle one at that. Not for Heywood the intricate and Italianate morals and displaced sexuality of Middleton, for example. Heccat may share to a small degree the Wise-woman's psychological insight (evident in her "discovery" of Sebastian's problem), but her reputation and power are not dependent upon it, nor is she any kind of self-aggrandizer. The Wise-woman of Hogsdon is not above a shameless plug. She places herself in well-known company and has the world speak for her. In this context, the world is not just the few characters on the stage--it is the stage itself, and the audience in the theatre, who will spread her repute when they leave.

Hogsdon's Wise-woman is also "good at many things." Her house doubles as a brothel and a refuge for women (like Francisca in The Witch) who bear children out of wedlock; she places these children in the world. Usually they are left on the doorsteps of the wealthy; it is implied that this is a higher status than the babes would have achieved otherwise. Therefore she changes the order. These are the trades for which she is considered unruly, those with sexual and deviant overtones. She herself catalogues her accomplishments (perhaps aware that leaving only the world to speak of her is not as efficient as speaking of herself):

First, I am a Wise-Woman, and a Fortune-teller, and under that I deale in Physicke and Fore-speaking, in Palmistry, and recovering of things lost. Next, I undertake to cure Madd folkes. Then I keepe Gentlewomen Lodgers, to furnish such Chambers as I let out by the night. Then I am provided for bringing young Wenches to bed; and for a need, you see I can play the Match-maker. Shee that is but one, and



profeseth so many, may well be tearmed a Wise-woman, if there bee any.<sup>7</sup>

She places her status as Wise-woman first. Of the subsets of fortune-telling, Forespeaking (divining the future) is the only one which could conceivably be even remotely occult. Davies notes that within the play, the lost goods which she finds are husbands and, for Sencer, a wife.<sup>8</sup> The others are practical talents, which rely more on knowledge of one's subjects than on any kind of powers. In this she is similar to Lyly's Mother Bombie--a parallel underlined by the country girl coming to the Wise-woman to find out whether or not she is a maid. Just as Mother Bombie's forespeaking comes from an intelligence which can piece together the plot far ahead of the players, so too the Wise-woman's knowledge probably plays the largest part.

As stated above, there is nothing in the play which could be considered a spell. Second Luce, when watching the Wise-woman at work, exclaims, "What can this Witch, this Wizard, or old Trot, / Doe by Inchantment, or by Magicke spell? / Such as professe that Art should be deepe Schollers. / What reading can this simple Woman have?"<sup>9</sup> The answer to the last question, as the Wise-woman herself explains, is none. She leafs through books because it is expected of her calling. Second Luce's scorn serves two purposes. It specifically removes the Wise-woman from any accusations of magic (despite her status as multiple mother/midwife, which, as Deborah Willis notes, usually opens a woman to the charge of witchcraft). Also, it demonstrates the split, or perceived split, between "high" magic, practised by such as Dee and Fludd, "real" or intellectual magicians, and "low" magicians, or "common" or cunning folk. These two claims are absolute because Luce 2 is the most clear-sighted character in the play, the one who can outmanoeuvre even the Wise-woman herself. Backing up Luce's observation, the Wise-woman claims no powers at all, just wisdom

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<sup>7</sup>994-1002.

<sup>8</sup>Davies 78.

<sup>9</sup>442-45.

superior to those who consult her: "Fie, fie, what a toyle, and a moyle it is, for a woman to be wiser than all her neighbours!" she exclaims at 404-05. The audience gets a hint of what gullible folk could mistake or misinterpret to be oracular obtuseness or wisdom. To Boyster's query of "Art wise," she replies, "I am as I am, and there's an end."<sup>10</sup> The audience knows that this is an example of the Wise-woman's down-to-earth approach. She describes things as she sees them. But for those who have no common sense, the answer is oblique enough, or evasive enough, to build a (minor) mystery around.

Mother Bombie, Mother Sawyer, and the Wise-woman are all figures tied to a specific locality. Mother Bombie and Mother Sawyer inhabit a liminal world, however, one in which "reality," as the characters know it, is different; in WWH the Wise-woman's house is a location in which liminal and unruly women are made real, definite--where their own definitions of themselves function, rather than the definitions imposed upon them by society. Davies observes, "[Chartley's] compulsive bigamy suspends the pairing off of partners, and consequently suspends both Luces [and Gratiana] between the state of maidenhood and marriage."<sup>11</sup> The two Luces and Gratiana are, in the play, rendered liminal by men, and to some extent by their own desire to assume a fully sexual existence (within, of course, the restrictions of marriage). The Wise-woman grants them these desires, and renders them legitimate. Hence Davies' observation,

In fact, her house is a gathering point for sexually deviant women. It is a place of witchcraft, not just because the old woman in charge poses as a white witch, for, in addition, the prostitutes and unwed mothers the wise-woman takes in can be linked with the popular conception of witches as sexually insatiable sorceresses. It is Chartley who makes the connection. . . .<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>558-61.

<sup>11</sup>Davies 70.

<sup>12</sup>Davies 79-80.



The first connection Chartley actually makes is a conflation of all the terms by which a cunning woman can be called. Luce states, "If you purpose to be so privately married, I know one excellent at such an exploit: are you not acquainted with the Wise-woman of Hogdson [sic]?" Chartley replies, dodging the question, "O the witch, the Beldame, the Hagge of Hogsdon."<sup>13</sup> Luce denies, as Luce 2 will later, that there is any witchery about the Wise-woman.

Chartley has been in the area for a while; he has heard of the Wise-woman's reputation. However, it is not because she is a wise-woman, but simply because she runs a brothel. Her reputation as a madam (amongst other things) is underlined by Sencer late in the play, when he voices his intention to "goe to the Looming womans, the Fortune tellers, the any thing, the no thing."<sup>14</sup> "Thing," either on its own or in combination with "any," "some," or "no," carries with it meanings of the genitalia of either sex.<sup>15</sup> The Wise-woman runs a definite place, a place where many things can be found.<sup>16</sup> If "any thing" is glossed as a male reference and "nothing" as a female, then Sencer's reference de-sexes the Wise-woman, or places her into the liminal state of a woman past woman-ness (i.e., in old age, past menopause) which hags inhabit. "Looming" refers probably not only to the embroidery skill which is mentioned briefly in the play, but also to the interweaving of man and woman as warp and weft. Chartley's statement, beginning at 1107, underlines this definition: "nay, that have not beene married this six houres, and to have my shittle-wits runne a Wooll-gathering already!" Chartley is ever concerned with wenching, and when he first encounters the Wise-woman on stage, he is "halfe-drunke" and in search of "sport."<sup>17</sup> Next is the connection to which Davies refers, excerpted below.

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<sup>13</sup>376-79.

<sup>14</sup>1683-84.

<sup>15</sup>Eric Partridge, Shakespeare's Bawdy (1947; London: Routledge, 1968) 199.

<sup>16</sup>This may have bearing on the matron in Clarkenwell-Green who was "good at many things" as well.

<sup>17</sup>504, 506.

Chart. You are the Wise-woman, are you? and have wit to keepe your selfe warme enough, I warrant you . . . you are too old, you Hagge, now, for conjuring up Spirits your selfe; but you keep prettie yong Witches under your roofe, that can doe that.

Wisewo. I, or my Family conjure up any Spirits! I defie thee, thou yong Hare-brain'd--<sup>18</sup>

Leonard notes the sexual meaning of conjuring spirits--causing an erection (106). The Wise-woman, however, in light of the epithets which Chartley throws at her--witch, hag, beldame, enchantress, sorceress, she-devil, Hecate, Proserpine--interprets the accusation specifically as one of witchcraft, and boils over with wrath. In her mind, therefore, witchcraft and what society (or, more specifically, patriarchy) calls sexual deviance (or freedom) are not linked. One is abominable; the other is merely a trade and a choice, or way of life. The Wise-woman resists any effort to add diabolism to her self-definition; she does not see witchcraft as a potential gain, or an inevitability, as Mother Sawyer does. The Wise-woman is more civil to the blunt (but civil) Boyster. At 562, he inquires if she can "conjure." Again, she answers only the surface meaning, sensitive to the danger in the denotation, rather than the connotation. Conjuring is not something one bandies about, even in word-play: "Oh, that's a foule word! but I can tell you your Fortune, as they say; I have some little skill in Palmistry, but never had to do with the devill."<sup>19</sup>

The warmth to which Chartley refers also carries a sexual connotation. This (along with his incivility) accounts for the Wise-woman immediately repulsing him as a "knave" (513), much as Luce does. Chartley at 275-76 says impatiently to Luce, "a figge for this modesty, it hinders many a good man from many a good turne." The sexual meaning in his statement is clear, for Chartley is driven solely by immoderate sexual desire. Though his person is pleasing, Chartley's coarse, untamed tongue disgusts Luce around line 296; in lines 301-02 she equates "rudenesse" and "lust":

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<sup>18</sup>511-520.

<sup>19</sup>563-65.



"But since I see your rudenesse finds no limit, / I leave you to your lust." Gratiana's reaction is similar. She despises Chartley's "rudenesse," and states,

But were I to chuse,  
Which of these two should please my fancie best,  
I sooner should affect this Gentleman,  
For his mild carriage, and his faire discourse,  
Then my hot Suitor; Ruffians I detest:  
A smooth and square behavior likes mee best.<sup>20</sup>

The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon provides audience and reader with a twist very unusual in witchcraft plays. Chartley is the shrew, the "Catterwauler," the unruly character who must be tamed for the happy ending to take place. He must overcome his overweening lust and its expression on his tongue. By the definitions seen in other texts, and even the definition cited by Davies above, Chartley is the witch of the piece, making the connection between insatiable lust and sorcery physically, in himself, as well as verbally. Even so, it is a milder sort of witchcraft than in other texts; or perhaps a truer, more realistic one, based on societal viewpoints alone. No whiff of brimstone ever taints WWH.

This does not mean Heywood neglects morals. The names of his female protagonists underscore Chartley's rakishness: Luce and Gratiana. "Luce" denotes light, and Davies notes that, "the translation of Luce into Light indicates their virtue."<sup>21</sup> Gratiana is interchangeable with grace, and indeed Gratiana is referred to as Grace within the play itself. Chartley, however, cannot see their "hidden" meaning, or true natures. Instead of seeing them as wonders, he claims he will see their non-submission to him as a miracle: "[I]f I doe not find a tricke, both to weare her, and wearie her, it may prove a piece of Wonder."<sup>22</sup> At the end of the play, he has lost his

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<sup>20</sup>689-94 (emphasis mine). There is enough ambiguity left in this passage to doubt the identity of "this Gentleman." It should be Sencer, but it could be the ever pleasant and even-tongued Haringfield, whom Chartley has sent as his proxy. Haringfield is the only man in the drammatis personae [sic] to be accorded a beneficent epithet--he is set up as "Civill" against "wild-headed," "blunt," and "conceited" (Chartley, Boyster, and Sencer, respectively).

<sup>21</sup>Davies 71.

<sup>22</sup>1252-54.

suit to Grace, but then he never had any claim on grace to begin with. He can, however, turn towards the true light, his intended Luce, and this allows his reclamation and resolution.<sup>23</sup>

To emphasise both Chartley's unruliness and his redemption, Heywood pays special attention to the construction of Chartley's speech. In his first exchange with Luce, Luce speaks in metre. Chartley's tongue overruns all limits. Chartley sends Haringfield to Gratiana on his behalf. Both Haringfield and Gratiana, in their brief interchange, speak in metre; Gratiana as demonstrated above even ends the mini-scene on a rhyming couplet. Chartley throughout the play speaks in loud lines never empty of innuendo, lines which sprawl across the page. He manages to rise to courtly, mannered, metred speech rarely before the end of the play--when he is lying, and recounting the lie afterwards to Luce. When he claims to have received news that his father is dying, and takes in the gullible Sir Harry and soft-hearted Gratiana with a display of bathos, he speaks in metre. When recounting it, he mocks civilised or courtly love speech. Lines 2136-48 see Chartley call Luce "asse," "foole," and "wench," and be brusque and impatient in his lust. He still claims he loves Luce and is married to her, yet he will marry another for all that; when Luce asks "How is it possible you can loue mee, and goe about to marry another," Chartley reveals the depth of his potential depravity.<sup>24</sup> "Dost thou not know she's rich?" queries Chartley, and continues blithely, "Why you foole as soone as I haue got her dower, it is but giuing her a dram, or a pill to purge melancholy to make her turne vp her heeles. . . ." <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Chartley also manages to turn other men from the true path, particularly Luce's father, who laments that he exchanged Luce for Lucre. But he repents more quickly than Chartley.

<sup>24</sup>2155-56.

<sup>25</sup>2157-60.



In the last scene, Chartley's speech becomes desperate as he becomes cornered. Finally, when he realises that he has no recourse, that all of his schemes have been overset, he utters the final lines in the play:

Nay mother midnight theres some loue for you.  
 Out of thy folly, beeing reputed wise,  
 Wee, selfe conceated haue our follyes found.  
 Beare thou the name of all these comick acts.  
Luce, Luce and Grace, (O covetous man) I see  
 I sought to ingrosse what now sufficeth three,  
 Yet each one wife enough, one Nuptiall feast  
 Shall serue three Bridalls where bee thou chiefe guest.<sup>26</sup>

These lines are measured, mannered, in metre. They show no sexual "rudenesse"; instead, they end in a marriage couplet, as the young people end up in their couples. The whole speech is framed by the Wise-woman of Hogsdon, "mother midnight" in the first line and "chiefe guest" in the last. She orders this speech as she orders the action. The Wise-woman is not content, like Mother Bombie, merely to observe. She schemes and plans, plots and connives, taking the most active role she can.

When Luce 2 accuses her of chicanery, the Wise-woman admits to it, and yet turns it to her account. From calling her a "simple Woman" earlier, who practises "palpable grosse foolery," Luce 2 learns something herself--how to market what she is.<sup>27</sup> Second Luce states that the Wise-woman cannot read; the Wise-woman punningly replies that when she appears to be reading Ptolemy, or some other book, she "tell[s] the leaves; for to be ignorant, and seeme ignorant, what greater folly?"<sup>28</sup> Having heard her answers and having seen how she operates, Luce 2 realises that wisdom depends more on reputation and self-definition than on actual wisdom.

Luce 2 is originally immune to the Wise-woman. More than her dramatic counterparts, the Wise-woman is dependent on her locality. Her neighbours form her

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<sup>26</sup>2324-331.

<sup>27</sup>445-46.

<sup>28</sup>885-86.

clientele, persuaded of her wisdom as much by her reputation as her acts. This reputation works only in her locality. Those who come with fresh eyes and mind, like Luce 2, can easily see through the patter to the cozenage which lies beneath, calling it "palpable grosse foolery" (446). Yet once Luce 2 has been in the area for a while, she can see not only the charlatanism, but the purpose it serves. She finally grants the Wise-woman her status, and in doing so brings herself fully into the play. Somewhere between rue and admiration, Luce 2 says, "Beleeve me, this is a cunning Woman; neither hath she her name [Wise-woman] for nothing, who out of her ignorance, can foole so many that thinke themselves wise."<sup>29</sup> As an outsider, not believing in the Wise-woman's ability, she stood in the way of the resolution as much as Chartley.

Luce 2 is an intriguing character. A girl, she disguises herself as a boy well enough to fool the Wise-woman, who is well versed in the games of boys and girls, and she casts off her disguise as a boy to become a woman, and a wife. In following Chartley from the countryside, she informs us after witnessing Chartley's betrothal to Luce 1 that she will throw a spoke into the wheel, if she can wheedle herself into the Wise-woman's service. Even if Chartley had not then pursued Gratiana, there would have been a muddle to sort out. In leaving the countryside, Chartley catalyses the action, even as he furthers it by courting Gratiana, by bringing Luce 2 into the play.

Davies interprets the doubling of names thus:

[T]he Luces' shared indeterminacy of status can explain why they share the same name. The doubled name of these heroines is very odd (not to mention confusing); but, as part of the riddle [of the plot/plot suspension], both the name and its repetition make sense. For while the translation of Luce into Light indicates their virtue . . . they are unanchored from the gender roles approved by the patriarchy, [and therefore] the Luces are loose, unfixed, displaced.<sup>30</sup>

This observation is even more true of Luce 2, who first displaces herself by cross-dressing. Luce 2 also assumes an unfixed voice. Luce 1 calls the Wise-woman

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<sup>29</sup>887-89.

<sup>30</sup>Davies 71.



"mother," is called by her "daughter," and is in complete sympathy with her.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, both Luce's self-image and the image she projects to the audience and reader suffers from the dilemma she teases Boyster with in III.ii:

Boyst. what art thou? Girle or Boy?  
2. Luce. Both, and neither; I was a Ladd last night, but in the morning I was conjured into a Lasse. And being a Girle now, I shall be translated to a Boy anon. Here's all I can at this time say for my selfe: Farewell.<sup>32</sup>

Luce 2 vacillates. In one sense she fulfills Davies' observation of suspension "between the states of maidenhood and marriage," staying liminal right till the end of the play. Her "true" marriage (i.e., the one in which she is openly herself) is not seen by the audience, although there are no doubts it will occur. Luce 2, however, is also and paradoxically non-liminal. She swings definitely between identification as a female and as a male.

Many times throughout the play Luce laments her female, unmarried state in asides. For the most part these concern themselves with loss of maidenhood and her desire to possess Chartley. In these speeches she is undoubtedly female. But in two key passages she provides the male, patriarchal viewpoint. The first has been touched upon already: Luce 2 provides the learned men's opinion of the common or cunning folk at 442-46, and condemns what Kathleen McLuskie calls, "popular appropriation of the prerogatives of learned men."<sup>33</sup> The second example sits even more oddly upon her lips. Just before Luce 2 grants the title of wise-woman to her employer, she

<sup>31</sup>"Mother": 577, 977. "Daughter": 983, 1730. She must be part of the "Family" that the Wise-woman defends from Chartley's accusation at 519. Though Partridge notes that "daughter," as in "daughter of the game," denotes a prostitute, neither he nor the OED give "mother" the meaning of "madam." Gratiana is not one of the Wise-woman's daughters. Taber shows her the way, knowing it from a previous consultation of the Wise-woman (2061-62). Gratiana hasn't the wit or facility of either of the Luces; perhaps this hints at a criterion for the Wise-woman's "daughters."

<sup>32</sup>1037-41. Note that desire plays a key part in the confusion. Being (allegedly) male, her "spirit" was conjured into a girl, echoing Chartley's allegation of conjuring spirits. But in this case Luce is doing the conjuring, for although the Wise-woman provides the situation, Luce provides the desire.

<sup>33</sup>Kathleen E. McLuskie, Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists (London: St. Martin's P, 1994) 131.

speaks heavily moralising lines. "Most strange," she exclaims, "that womans brain should apprehend / Such lawlesse, indirect and horrid meanes / For covetous gaine!"<sup>34</sup>

This speech clearly exposes fraud and the Wise-woman's house of unruly women as undesirable. This speech also demonstrates frightful hypocrisy, for Luce 2 herself, cross-dressed despite strictures against it and practising indirect plots which horribly torment more than one character before the resolution of the play, is guilty on all counts. Moreover, Chartley catalogues his worldly goods at 1069-70, and they sound not inconsiderable; his wife would indeed gain by marriage. Heywood uses this hypocrisy to underline his sympathy with the race of cunning folk, by showing its condemnation to be as much chicanery and sham as its practise--possibly more so.

Luce 1 has a biological father, and an adopted mother in the Wise-woman. She wishes to marry Chartley, but her father's agreement is gained by Chartley's wealth. The father acknowledges as much when he suspects Chartley's unfaithfulness, when he refers to himself reproachfully as a "Broker to lewd Lust" and a "Pander to my daughter."<sup>35</sup> He then laments the loss of his wife, and says his and his daughter's shame would have killed her, were she not dead already. Luce's morals, one gathers, are therefore drawn from her mother, not her father. They are reinforced by the Wise-woman, the woman to whom Luce turns when she wishes to be married, albeit covertly.

Chartley first mentions Luce 1 early in the play, and sets her up as a potential witch, using language which conveys ensorcelment and fascination: "she hath a Browe bewitching, Eyes ravishing, and a Tongue enchanting. And indeed shee hath no fault in the world but one, and that is, shee is honest: and were it not for that, she were the onely sweet Rogue in Christendome. . . .But the foole stands in her owne light, and will doe nothing without Marriage. . . ." <sup>36</sup> Chartley cedes her intelligence

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<sup>34</sup>877-79.

<sup>35</sup>1165, 1171.

<sup>36</sup>176-83.



(or at least cunning), wit, and beauty. She has the potential to be one of the sort of wild, unruly girl whose beds Chartley has been in the habit of frequenting. Chartley complains of her honesty, which removes her from the charge of unruliness. Luce lives up to her name, but with a twist--she is too light to be light. One may assume therefore that though she is one of the Wise-woman's daughters, she is not a daughter of the game. Luce's honesty speaks for the Wise-woman's. The Wise-woman speaks the truth; now one can determine that she is not the sort of madam who presses girls into her service. She does not define her girls. She lets them define themselves.

Davies observes, "it is over the issue of female desire that the difference between the Luces breaks down. Luce 1's apparent passivity is contradicted by the fact that she desires Chartley as much as Luce 2 does."<sup>37</sup> Luce 1 is not really passive at all. She resists Chartley's blandishments, and when she decides to take a course of action she does so quickly and decisively. She brings the Wise-woman into the plot. After she discovers Chartley's betrayal, she quickly brings herself in hand enough to tell her father they must plot and scheme to reveal/recover him, rather than confront him outright. She colludes with the Wise-woman for the resolution, and is the bait whom Chartley accepts.

This independence of spirit is the reason that Chartley manages to disparage her so effectively. When Luce, similar to Hermione in The Winter's Tale, falls into a righteous swoon at the evidence of Chartley's duplicity, the following interchange between Chartley, Sir Harry and the wedding party occurs:

Chart. Shees troubled with the falling sickness, for  
Oft hath she fallen before me. . . .

Sir Har. Keepe off, the disease is infectious.

Chart. If it were in a man, it were nothing, but the falling sicknesse in  
a woman is dangerous.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Davies 81.

<sup>38</sup>1600-06.

Chartley accuses Luce of being one of his many light-of-loves, one of the daughters of the Wise-woman's game. The surface accusation of epilepsy, which Leonard glosses, is overthrown by the explicit double standard voiced in Chartley's last sentence. Sir Harry may not keep pace with Chartley's wit, for he may not understand until that last line that Chartley means Luce is prone to taking a tumble with men. However, the accusation of infectiousness works either way. Men may evince and act upon sexual desire with no ill effect on world or companions. Unruly women, however, can taint by their touch and vicinity. Chartley here voices the opinion of the controlling patriarchy, something which sits ill upon his lips (though he benefits from its mores). If one wanted to cast Chartley in a regulatory, patriarchal role, then, harking back to the silencing of female characters in The Witch, one could say that at the end of the play, Chartley reassumes the "proper" voice of verse, taking it from the women he sought after. He partially reinstates the "natural" order. But by acknowledging the Wise-woman instead of his beloved in the closing speech/verse, he twists typical patriarchal endings. He invites the only non-silenced, still-unruly woman to preside over the nuptials. We have seen too much of both Chartley and the Wise-woman to believe either that Chartley thinks by this inclusion he can silence her, or that she will be silenced.

We are used to his cavalier behaviour and observations, such as, "[I]t is a common thing in this age to goe for a Mayde, and bee none."<sup>39</sup> These commentaries carry no moral judgment with them--any judgment inferred comes from the reader's or possibly playwright's mind. However, throughout the play Chartley has had wit enough to speak to his women's fathers in terms they understand. Sir Harry has an inflated moral ideal; Chartley appeals to it. Sir Harry's lack of wit and learning, seen previously in the scene between Sencer and Sir Boniface, causes Chartley to belabour both his point and his pun.

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<sup>39</sup>364-65.



Wisdom and wit and the lack thereof form a driving theme in WWH. The Wise-woman's own definitions have been discussed. The courteous Haringfield is the one gentleman in the play who accepts without question that wisdom is a pragmatic thing, rather than an abstract. Charged with a drunken Chartley and an ever more-incensed Wise-woman, he states, "Forbeare him till he have his Senses about him, and I shall then hold thee for a Wise-woman indeed: otherwise, I shall doubt thou hast thy name for nothing."<sup>40</sup> Wisdom is proven by common-sense, discretion and prudence--a view not far off from the Wise-woman's own. Linked with this, however, and reading 508-09 ("wee shall be thought very wise men, of all such as shall see us goe into the Wise-womans") ironically, Haringfield believes that those who consult the Wise-woman to be lacking in wisdom. Bearing in mind the gulls and simpletons who earlier in the scene form the bulk of the Wise-woman's patrons, this is understandable. However, it also reflects on the reputation of the cunning-women; those of "gentle" backgrounds regard them as a sort of ugly necessity (perhaps like prostitutes). The unknown woman voices this dis-ease (perhaps catching, like a woman's falling-sickness), saying that, "I would not have it knowne to my Neighbours, that I come to a Wise-woman for any thing, by my truly."<sup>41</sup>

Boyster establishes his honesty early. He acknowledges that he cannot be counted wise, saying, "'Tis no matter for my words, they are not many, and those not very wise one's neither."<sup>42</sup> This brusqueness and lack of verbal facility is part and parcel of his lack of charm. Luce 2 later observes that it takes more than brevity and control of one's tongue to claim wisdom. Speaking of Boyster, she notes, "Hee should be wise, because he speaks few words."<sup>43</sup> Still later, Luce 1 informs the audience that whatever else Boyster may be, his behaviour (if not speech) as a lover is

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<sup>40</sup>521-23.

<sup>41</sup>468-69.

<sup>42</sup>243-44.

<sup>43</sup>559-60.

commendable. "This is no tedious Courtship," she sighs, "hee's soone answer'd, / So should all Sutors else bee, were they wise; / For being repulst, they doe but waste their dayes / In thankless suites, and superficiall praise."<sup>44</sup> Boyster, however simple and blunt, takes refuge not in words and indirect schemes, but in action. He means to put an "end" to the Wise-woman for what he perceives as her betrayal of him, and actually draws. The Wise-woman hides behind Sencer.

In this scene both Sencer and Boyster prove themselves worthy of lady-loves. When attempting to win Gratiana, Sencer impersonates a Latin teacher, and bests Sir Boniface in wit and volume. Taber exclaims that he backs Sencer, for, "he speakes lowder, and that you know is ever the signe of the most learning."<sup>45</sup> (Whereas Luce 2 can exclaim upon the division in magical learning from a "high" cultural point of view, Sir Harry and his serving-man exemplify the "low" culture's view of "high" learning.) However, when appealed to by the Wise-woman in the name of gentillesse, Sencer defends her, claiming, "hee that touches her, Drawes against mee."<sup>46</sup> Boyster continues the fight until such time as he notices his beloved. He then demonstrates his finer feelings by apostrophising, "what Luce heare! be patient and put up them, shee must not see the end."<sup>47</sup> These actions differentiate them still further from Chartley, who thinks nothing of telling one "wife" that he plans to poison his next one.

Attitudes to the Wise-woman differ according not only to characters' perceptions of her and her wisdom, but also according to their perceptions of her actions. Her actions are what first prejudice Luce 2 against her. Luce 2 immediately assumes that the Wise-woman is "some bawd trade-falne" (493), but states that, "Ile serve her, bee't but to pry into the mystery of her Science" (494-95). This aside may

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<sup>44</sup>1276-80.

<sup>45</sup>1312-13.

<sup>46</sup>1744-45.

<sup>47</sup>1751-52.



be overheard, for the Wise-woman speaks the next line, "A proper stripling, and a wise, I warrant him" (496). Irony exists in the Wise-woman's recognition of Luce 2's clear-sightedness, but failure to recognise Luce 2's sex.

Boyster is rarely uncivil. However, understandably, when the realisation dawns that he may have been deceived, his reaction is immediate, and oriented towards the Wise-woman. "O for some Gun powder to blow up this Witch, this Shee-catt, this damn'd Sorceresse! O I could teare her to fitters with my teeth!" he cries.<sup>48</sup> When he rages against her physically, he calls her "Witch, this hagge, this beldam, this wisard" (1740-41). When things go wrong, accusations of witchcraft come out. Ironically, when, against what Boyster perceives to be all odds, things start to come right, Boyster's surprise and amazement manifest themselves in the same way: "My grannam is a Witch."<sup>49</sup> To a lesser extent, Chartley's acknowledgment of the Wise-woman's superior plot functions in the same way. From being a madam, a "Shee-mastiffe" keeping watch over prostitutes (or "Shee-catterwaulers"), or alternatively a "sugar-candie sweet Trot," she has graduated to being "mother midnight."<sup>50</sup>

Though no lasting condemnation of the Wise-woman exists in the play (it helps that the man who rages against her is the simplest of the gentlemen), Boyster's actions and reactions, and Chartley's last judgment, serve to underline the problems faced by women in other witchcraft texts, and no doubt in the "real" world outside the construct of the theatre. Be they never so careful and prosaic, doing good or failing to be good can be interpreted as threatening, as witchcraft. Even had she no reputation for wisdom, her age and looks could speak against her. Boyster, the gullible, is again Heywood's medium for conveying this. In his first encounter with the Wise-woman, he is taken aback by her appearance. "And had the devill never any thing to doe with

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<sup>48</sup>1043-44.

<sup>49</sup>2124.

<sup>50</sup>529, 526, 936, 2324.

thee? Thou look'st somewhat like his damme," he queries.<sup>51</sup> When satisfied, he gives her "Grannam" in a gesture of respect (though that will be paired in the end with "Witch"), but still draws attention to her appearance: "Th'art a good Grannam; and, but that thy teeth stand like hedge-stakes in thy head, I'd kisse thee."<sup>52</sup>

The Wise-woman hence joins the ranks of other hags like Dipsas, Mother Sawyer, and Heccat. Her age and appearance, as well as her behaviour, mark her as beyond the boundaries society, especially patriarchy, have marked out for women.

Davies notes,

the comedy here derives from an imagined situation in which women, victimized by a promiscuous and bigamous man who knowingly exploits the ambiguities of matrimonial law, are empowered to punish their victimizer, and rescue themselves from the unhappy position in which he had put them. In order to do so they turn to the wise-woman, the title character, who provides both the method and the place for bringing down the villain.<sup>53</sup>

The situation is imagined in that it is a self-conscious construct. Davies also believes that closure in the play is "unsettled by the wise-woman's determination to remain a figure of transgression."<sup>54</sup> Like Heccat, the Wise-woman does not even acknowledge the need to reform. However, unlike in *Macbeth*, where the Weïrd Sisters definitely unsettle the end, there is no sense of horror or dis-ease about the ending situations with either Heccat or the Wise-woman. Heccat is safely distanced. On the other hand, the Wise-woman of Hogsdon is safely enclosed: within her community; within her house; and within her extended family. As long as she operates within these limits, which are both self-imposed and imposed by outside considerations, no problem exists, especially for women. The only real threat comes from Boyster, and the threat is met by Sencer, also an "outsider." The only dis-ease is manifested by a

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<sup>51</sup>566-67.

<sup>52</sup>583-84.

<sup>53</sup>Davies 78.

<sup>54</sup>Davies 84.



unnamed gentlewoman and Haringfield, the most gentlemanly gentleman. This is a class dis-ease, generated not by the woman herself but by her social situation; the higher classes not liking to refer to someone whose house is haunt for kitchen-maids, serving-men, and the uncertain (and for them undefined) presence of some of the Wise-woman's daughters.

The ease felt by the audience is generated by Heywood. Chartley and the Wise-woman know they are in a play; they communicate this to the audience. This produces collusion between watcher and watched which more or less ignores the boundary of the stage. Heywood also places his characters in a believable setting. Nothing in the play is overly remarkable, except for the extreme number of confusions. Maids being abandoned in the countryside, abandoned young men seeking their fortune in a more urban setting and having recourse to gaming houses and brothels, people seeking to know their fortune; all these are the stuff of daily fare. We are not asked to believe in flying witches, strange murders at midnight, dukes and duchesses and drinking from skulls. Heywood invites and expects his audience to be in complete sympathy with the Wise-woman, as one with whom they can identify--crafty, conniving, but honest and mortal as well.

## CONCLUSION

*. . . the countless harlotries of the harlot, graceful mistress of sorcery, who betrays nations with her harlotries and peoples with her sorceries.*

*-Nah. 3.4.*

The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon is an anomaly. Unruly men and unruly women hold equal emphasis; neither is condemned. Although Chartley is tamed, he is not broken. Both sexes scheme and plot; women's plots, rather than men's, are victorious. Far from having to be reconciled to society, the Wise-woman is well-established within it, operating without hindrance. She has a strong sense of self and identity which she maintains throughout the play, and she allows her "daughters" to find their own self-definitions as well. The audience suffers no dis-ease with the ending, nor with the sexual desire expressed by various characters within the play. Partly this is because they are in collusion with the characters from very early on, and no character suffers overly from highly rhetorical emotion which might distance the "average" theatre-goer. A large part of the ease Heywood generates, however, comes from an essentially non-gendered audience. Men and women maintain interplay and discourse. Unlike most of the other texts under study (the exception being perhaps Mother Bombie), neither men nor women are inspired to horror, fragmented, controlled to the point of silence, or wrested from their self-definitions.

The Wise-woman is not a witch, and vehemently resists that appellation, as does her fellow cunning-woman, Mother Bombie. As soon as the term "witch" comes into being, backed by any kind of belief, either on the part of the characters in the play or of the audience, tensions are immediately introduced which destroy any kind of ease. Some tension results from beliefs on the inherent nature of magic, gendered



from its inception, as Valerie Flint observes: "the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch, for example, insisted that the human race was taught the magical arts by fallen angels (they taught them, in fact, to their wives, chosen from the daughters of men, and thus the damage was done)."<sup>1</sup> As this and the epigraph demonstrate, in the Judeo-Christian tradition women, witchcraft, sexuality, domesticity and evil are immediately problematised at a basic level. Graham Harvey notes, "The 'witchcraft' passages are among the texts of terror . . . of the Bible. At the centre of their power is the fact that they do not provide enough information to identify exactly what a 'sorceress' is, or does."<sup>2</sup> This uncertainty is mirrored in literature, and is extended to play with fantasies and fears of female power, which may manifest in dualism and deferral, as The Faerie Queene demonstrates. In some cases, witchdom is conferred, as in the case of Lady Macbeth, without the term actually being used. In this case, strength of character, perceived gender transgression, sexuality, and verbal facility all serve to earmark the witch. These are the witches, the viragos, who engender such dis-ease in male characters and the male audience that they must be bested, distanced, destroyed. Only then can the patriarchal viewpoint be appeased. Macbeth represents the epitome of dis-ease because the title character, as well as his wife, unsettles the audience, and because his successor is implied to be no better.

Such plays run counter to any sort of Renaissance feminism. Constance Jordan believes,

In theory, Renaissance feminists sought to establish the truth that men and women were first and most importantly human beings; for the most part, they saw little meaning in sexual--that is physiological--

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<sup>1</sup>Valerie I.J. Flint, The Rise of Magic In Early Medieval Europe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 18.

<sup>2</sup>Graham Harvey, "The Suffering of Witches and Children," Words Remembered, Texts Renewed, eds. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G.E. Watson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1995) 129.

difference. Not surprisingly, their model was frequently the virile woman.

In practice their individualism often led to the celebration of a set of virtues that they identified as feminine as opposed to masculine, and this celebration served to advance arguments for conceiving of human nature as androgynous . . . behavioristically both masculine and feminine if virtuous; brutal and effeminate or cruel and vain if vicious.<sup>3</sup>

The texts to hand, however, demonstrate that authors use the virile woman, with the possible exception of Spenser's Britomart, as a monitory figure, a horror to be avoided or killed; likewise, the truly feminine man (as opposed to the merely cross-dressed man), such as Macbeth or Henry VI, also presents a threat to order and the state.

For women, behaviour and looks contribute to their being defined as dangers. Both Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou dress as men. Transvestitism worried both Elizabeth and Jacobean society; as Elaine Hobby notes, "Whether or not many women actually cross-dressed in this way, certainly the belief was commonplace that some wished to do so, and that to allow such behaviour was to allow a threat to natural order."<sup>4</sup> Unlike Luce or Britomart, who forsake their male roles, Joan and Margaret refuse to do so, and thus horrify the men around them.

Most of the women in this study who generate any kind of dis-ease are denigrated as hags, whether or not their age or appearance warrants the description. Men generally commit this act, in an attempt to force the woman they dislike or fear into a definition they can control. Throughout this study we have seen that actively controlling someone's definition of self, or controlling the public perception of someone, grants power over the defined to the definer. Occasionally this power is illusory--York's description of Margaret of Anjou as a tiger-hearted hag is inaccurate,

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<sup>3</sup>Constance Jordan, Renaissance Feminism (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 8.

<sup>4</sup>Elaine Hobby, "The Politics of Gender," The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry, Donne to Marvell, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 42-43.



yet crucial for his own self-belief. He also belittles her looks in order to convince himself that she is evil. "In a culture where connections were regularly drawn between people's external features and their inner qualities," writes Hobby, "it is not surprising that this preoccupation with the lady's looks also links to wider opinions or anxieties about her other characteristics."<sup>5</sup> Hence when looking for a scapegoat, the people of Edmonton turn to an old woman whose looks happen to fall into the category of hag, and forcibly reinvent Mother Sawyer as a witch. The ability to hide true evil under the guise of beauty, threatening "natural" order by deceiving and seducing male judgment, raises anxiety in the overwhelmingly male-identified The Faerie Queene, and is lambasted by Mother Sawyer herself in The Witch of Edmonton.

Voice and verbal facility contribute to a witch's definition. Both are linked with sexuality. Verbal facility and lack of sexual continence, or the perceived lack thereof, are found in many of the plays in this study. Sara Eaton avers, "[O]n the stage the appearance of feminine fidelity, of honest reputation, is invariably the male protagonist's chief concern, and punishments are enacted 'privately', in homes, often in 'closets' or bedrooms."<sup>6</sup> Control takes place in a clearly defined space, one which the man literally owns, and the woman is placed and controlled as a possession within it. Semele in Endimion forms the exception, for her punishment is public, but both Hermione in The Winter's Tale and especially Desdemona in Othello suffer for speaking freely both in an intimate setting and in public. Ironically, their silence would have condemned them as well, for the very potential of their speech is

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<sup>5</sup>Hobby 40.

<sup>6</sup>Sara Eaton, "Defacing the Feminine in Renaissance Tragedy," The Matter of Difference, ed. Valerie Wayne (London: Harvester, 1991) 193.

threatening enough. However, faced with the choice, the authors and their male characters prefer imposing silence, as plays such as The Winter's Tale and The Witch demonstrate. Deferral and distance are also ways in which witches and unruly women are controlled. The Weïrd Sisters in Macbeth, for instance, do not affect or threaten the audience or characters directly because of their extreme liminality. Conversely, Mother Sawyer is scapegoated because she is liminal.

Not all the texts in this study argue for containment of female power, however. Shakespeare in Macbeth shows that only an integration of male and female power achieves any measure of success. Fragmented masculinity and femininity fail. Middleton appears to be delineating and supporting an outright patriarchy in The Witch, but Heccat is not the villain of the piece. By portraying the Duke and to a lesser extent Sebastian as the evils in the play, Middleton effectively exposes the flaws in his patriarchal society and argues for change. Heywood portrays a society which is convincingly realistic, in which the "happy ever after" includes both sexes.

There is no single image which sums up all of the witches and women in this study, though some characteristics, such as verbal facility (which is linked in contemporary thought to sexuality) are common to all. Mother Sawyer is not interchangeable with Margaret of Anjou, nor Joan La Pucelle with Mother Bombie. The image of the unruly woman or witch has a multiplicity of representation, which can be used multivalently. Robin Briggs notes, "Witchcraft was peculiarly malleable, available to fit any kind of discord, because the link between ill-will and physical effects did not need to be demonstrated. Although this gap would eventually play a vital role in encouraging elite scepticism on legal grounds, at the psychological level it allowed fantasy to run riot."<sup>7</sup> Anxieties about female power and sexuality therefore

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found their outlet in an image which could be changed to fit a particular author's or audience's scheme.

However, most of the criticism to date has assumed a male audience, or at least a male-identified one. The images of the witch and hag portrayed on the stage and in such works as The Faerie Queene must have had a different valency for women than for men. Phyllis Rackin demonstrates that tragic audiences were gendered differently than audiences of history,<sup>8</sup> yet does not demonstrate that this shift to a more feminine reception or characterising was seen as a positive thing. Where does this leave the female audience, or an audience of women? Women did attend the theatre, at court and in the city. They are consistently presented with women who, although they may have brief ascendancy, are humbled, controlled, or eliminated. At best they are distanced. Anything apart from humble, passive, sincere silence is excoriated. In some ways, therefore, the witch or unruly woman in these texts presents even more of a horror for women than they do for men. The plays which show patriarchy in its own unflattering light, or which amply and clearly demonstrate the manipulation of the image of the witch/woman/virago are, tellingly, the plays in this study which are least studied: 1 Henry 6, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton, and The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon.<sup>9</sup> These plays have been marginalised and discounted in the same manner as the characters in them, and the possibilities and arguments they represent. This argues for the power and importance of the virago, the witch, and the cunning woman, especially for those who seek to understand methods

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<sup>7</sup>Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbours (London: HarperCollins, 1996) 265.

<sup>8</sup>Phyllis Rackin, "Engendering the Tragic Audience: the Case of Richard III," Studies in the Literary Imagination 26 (1993): 47-65.

<sup>9</sup>Macbeth is widely studied, but the fact that critical opinion is so widely divided on the nature of the women and witches within it argue for a studied obscurity. Theatrical tradition holds it "hexed," however, which may be an instance of the same distancing.

of control perpetuated in literature and history. The silencing of the witch-women in late Elizabethan and early Stuart texts, and the effect thereof on not just the male but the female public, are areas which warrant further study.



## APPENDIX A: TWO VERSIONS OF HOLINSHED

From Holinshed 1577, vol. 2, 1429 entry:

And eve[n] at the same time, that mo[n]strous woma[n] named Joan la Pucell de Dieu, was presented vnto him at Chinon . . . of which woman yee maye finde more written in the French historie, touching hir birth, estate, and qualitie. But briefly to speak of hir doings, so much credite was giuen to hir, that she was honoured as a Saint, and so she handled the matter, that she was thought to be sent from god [sic] (1241).

In the chase and pursute was the Puselle taken with diuerse others. . . . The same Puselle was afterwardes sent vnto Roan, where . . . she was long tyme kept in prison, and at length by due processe of the lawes condemned for a Sorceresse. But at the first abjuring hir errors and great wickednesse, it was thought shee shoulde haue escaped death. But when it was after proued agaynste hir, that shee fell into the relaps, protesting the same vppon a wylfull and obstinate minde, shee was committed to the secular power, and by force thereof finally brent to Ashes (1246).

From Holinshed 1587 (Nicoll 1927; 1978)

the first weeke of March 1428 [sic], vnto Charles the Dolphin, at Chinon . . . was caried a yoong wench of an eightene yeeres old, called Ione Arc, by name of her father (a sorie *sheepheard*) Iames of arc, and Isabell hir mother ; brought vp poorlie in their trade of keeping cattell. . . . Of favour was she counted likesome, of person stronglie made and manlie, of courage great, hardie, and stout withall : an vnderstander of counsels though she were not at them ; great semblance of chastitie both of bodie and behaviour ; the name of Iesus in hir mouth about all hir businesses ; humble, obedient ; and fasting diuerse daies in the weeke . . . A person (as their bookes make hir) raised vp by power diuine, onelie for succour to the French estate the[n] deeplie in distresse . . .

Thus after pursued she manie bold enterprises to our great displeasure a two yeare together : for the time she kept in state vntill she were taken and for heresie and witcherie burned ; as in particulars hereafter followeth . . . [ten pages later, section entitled The Confession of Joan] Wherein, found though a virgin, yet first, shamefullie reiecting hir sex abominable in acts and apparell, to haue counterfeit mankind, and then, all damnable faithlesse, to be a pernicious instrument to hostilitie and bloudshed in diuelish witchcraft and sorcerie . . .

## APPENDIX B: CURSING (IN) SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST TETRALOGY

Cursing serves a dual purpose in the tetralogy.<sup>1</sup> It serves a structural purpose by indicating which character is serving or is to serve as a villain. It also flags stages in character development, be it moral or situational degeneration, an increase in personal power, or fulfillment of a life's role. To a large extent, the success of a curse depends on both the sex and the perceived or constructed gender of the speaker.

Joan and York start the tetralogical curse in 1 Henry 6, and by doing so invite on to the stage some of the villains in 2 Henry 6. Captured by the English, their view of Joan, as whore and sorceress, is the view on which the play ends. Act V scene iii is the scene in which Margaret of Anjou is introduced, and it is also the scene in which Joan begins to curse. Several critics have commented upon the fact that, dramatically speaking, Joan must be disposed of so that Margaret can continue her lineage. However, the fact that Joan curses just as Margaret enters is more specific and significant than a mere voidance of vitriol. As the Dog notes in Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton, cursing is an invitation for the devil to enter. The Devil does not enter in 1 Henry 6, but Suffolk and Margaret do.

Joan's first curse, "A plaguing mischief light on Charles and thee [York]! / And may ye both be suddenly surpris'd / By bloody hands, in sleeping in your beds!"<sup>2</sup> is inaccurate--odd for one who is billed by both sides as a prophetess--but may foreshadow Gloucester's murder. Her exiting/death curse is much more dramatic:

Puc. Then lead me hence, with whom I leave my curse:  
May never glorious sun reflex his beams  
Upon the country where you make abode;

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare, The First Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross (London: Methuen, 1962); The Second Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross (1957; London: Methuen, 1969); The Third Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew Cairncross (1964; London: Methuen, 1965); King Richard III, ed. Antony Hammond (London: Methuen, 1981). Hereafter 1 Henry 6, 2 Henry 6, 3 Henry 6, and Richard III in text; 1H6, 2H6, 3H6, and R3 in notes. All references to source materials for the plays from these editions unless designated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup>1H6 V.iii.39-41.



But darkness and the gloomy shade of death  
 Environ you, till mischief and despair  
 Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves!  
York. Break thou in pieces and consume to ashes,  
 Thou foul accursed minister of hell!  
Enter Cardinal. . .<sup>3</sup>

Whilst not fulfilled to the last letter--neither Warwick nor York breaks his neck or hangs himself--the rest of the tetralogy is filled with imagery of darkness, storm, and wrack, so much so that in 2 Henry 6 IV.i.93-97, the lieutenant refers to "the house of York. . . Burns with revenging fire; whose hopeful colours / Advance our half-fac'd sun, striving to shine," and not till 3 Henry 6 II.i does the sun specifically shine again for the Yorkist boys, only to be eclipsed again for Richard at Bosworth, who until he remasters himself takes the sun not shining to be a deadly omen.<sup>4</sup> Joan's death curse not only sets the scenic imagery but grants her more dignity than an exit pleading for her life would do. Final and/or death curses are held in especial awe, not only in contemporary thought (as evidenced by, for example, witches' scaffold speeches) but also in the tetralogy. The Duchess of York leaves the stage with a mother's curse; and all those who are denied a death or exiting curse in Richard III return just before the battle to curse Richard and bless Richmond.

In response to Joan, York begins to curse. This marks a degeneration in York's character which will erupt into the War of the Roses. His curse is also fulfilled, but hardly requires any foresight. After this point, York expressly wishes for continued war as opposed to an "effeminate peace"; acknowledges his own "boiling choler" which "chokes / The hollow passage of my poison'd voice"; and, when he curses, not the devil but Winchester walks onto the stage.<sup>5</sup> Cursing sets the scene for Suffolk, Margaret, and Winchester to become the next villains. David Daniell agrees that villainy must be ascribed to the men equally if not more than Margaret: "The evil at that point [Margaret's entry in 1 Henry 6] was all around her, not only in her: in the

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<sup>3</sup>V.iv.86-94

<sup>4</sup>R3 278-89.

<sup>5</sup>V.iv.120-21 and passim.

selfish advantage of Suffolk, and in that of Winchester more deeply."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, when Anne curses in Richard III, Richard walks onto the stage. This is not a case of foreshadowing, but completion; Richard himself in 3 Henry 6 makes it quite clear he will be the next and supreme villain. York's cursing in Part One more subtly alerts the reader or audience to the fact that York, too, has entered the downward spiral of evil.

York also utters the first curse in 2 Henry 6: "For Suffolk's duke, may he be suffocate / That dims the honour of this warlike isle!"<sup>7</sup> In York's view, Suffolk is responsible for the "effeminate peace" between England and France, and under his influence Henry, the "effeminate prince," has effeminised Britain. Though York does not possess the necessary insight to prophesy, he is unknowingly close to the mark, for it is Margaret who will attempt to steer the ship of state through its perilous course.<sup>8</sup> York paraphrases and rephrases Joan's curse of claustrophobic ruin, though he does manage the play on words. In 3 Henry 6 I.iv, York's death scene, the first line of his death curse again recalls Joan's words: "There, take the crown, and with the crown my curse; / And in thy need such comfort come to thee / As I now reap at thy too cruel hand!"<sup>9</sup>

York in his death scene has been reduced to such a state that his only weapons are words. He speaks from a position of powerlessness, and confronts a woman in a position of power, who wields both physical weapons and the power of the state that York considers his own. He says to Margaret: "Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible; / Thou stern, indurate, flinty, rough, remorseless."<sup>10</sup> They have reversed positions, for York in I.iv is "pitiful and flexible." Up to this point in the tetralogy, York provides a negative model for manliness. His power stems directly from action

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<sup>6</sup>Daniell 268.

<sup>7</sup>I.i.123-24.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. 1H6 V.iv.107, I.i.35. The ship, shipwreck, and sea dangers are so prevalent from 2H6 onward that it is beyond the scope of the present study to chart them all.

<sup>9</sup>I.iv.164-66.

<sup>10</sup>I.iv.141-42.



and violence, without any of the heroic grace of Talbot or Richmond, or even the religious contemplation of Henry VI. As he is specifically and only male, his words, and more specifically his curses, fail to have a full effect. Marilyn Williamson believes that verbosity, more particularly cursing, is a sign of almost complete powerlessness. Her gloss is that "the expression of rage increases the sense of impotence on the part of the powerless speaker."<sup>11</sup> This is certainly true of York. He does, however, achieve such eloquence in this scene that Northumberland, not Margaret, is reduced to tears--a further indication of the reversal which occurs in I.i, in which Henry disinherits his son in favour of the house of York.<sup>12</sup> Men in 3 Henry 6 I.iv are helpless, effeminised, as Northumberland's tears witness, and Margaret by comparison is more masculine than ever.

The very first scene of 3 Henry 6 sets up myriad inversions. The king is womanly, lacking the potent force and assertiveness a ruler should have; the queen becomes manly by assuming just those qualities; and, somehow, those men who serve under her also effeminise themselves by commandeering a female form of speech just as they reassert their manliness by going to war rather than acceding to a demeaning and "effeminate peace." Northumberland's and Clifford's curses are their responses to Henry's actions:

North. Be thou a prey unto the house of York,  
and die in bands for this unmanly deed!  
Clif. In dreadful war may'st thou be overcome,  
Or live in peace abandon'd and despis'd.<sup>13</sup>

Northumberland's curse comes true with a vengeance--Henry spends much of the play fleeing before, hiding and escaping from, and eventually succumbing to the Yorkists. Northumberland's disdain is not based on his political disapprobation of the act of disinheritance, but on the fact that Henry is "unmanly." By this act, Henry makes so

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<sup>11</sup>Marilyn L. Williamson, "When Men Are Rul'd by Women': Shakespeare's First Tetralogy," Shakespeare Studies 19 (1987): 50.

<sup>12</sup>Northumberland issues the effective curse in that scene.

<sup>13</sup>3H6 I.i.191-94.

public his lack of manliness that even the raving Lancastrian Clifford can no longer blind himself to it. Clifford's curse also is fulfilled--his first line applies to Henry, his second to Margaret. However, Clifford hedges his bets in his curse--one line or the other can hardly fail to come true under these (or any) circumstances. Still, the fact that men manage any kind of an efficacious curse is interesting, especially in light of the way in which cursing is normally viewed. Jonathan Barry, in his introduction to Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, summarises the contemporary viewpoint on cursing as follows:

such cursing was a basically female prerogative . . . however justifiable a curse might be, the tongue that uttered it was a female tongue, that unruly member on which so much evil was blamed and which was so much distrusted. It was around the figure of the tongue (together with images of sexuality, of course) that the image of female power/powerlessness revolved.<sup>14</sup>

When men take on this female prerogative, they not only are effeminising themselves, but, as they are not truly female, dooming themselves to failure. Joan's manly attributes and lack of concern for what society (specifically English society) term proper female behaviour dilute the efficacy of her curses. Margaret's curses in Richard III bear power because she no longer has to fulfill a man's role as well as a woman's (see chapter 5). That part of her life has ended, and Richard III sees her as a hag: liminal, but still female.

A brief look at the other men in the parts of Henry VI bears this out. Suffolk has been mentioned. The rebel Cade adds an ineffectual curse to his ineffectual rhetoric in 2 Henry 6 IV.iii.31-32, and Iden refers to Cade as "the curse of her that bare thee" in IV.x.76, something which would be much more appropriate and accurate said to the Duchess of York about Richard. Cade and Suffolk are both virile men with little or no hint of female weakness. Cade's retreat is the better part of valour, and Suffolk does not meekly bow his head to the severing stroke. Neither

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<sup>14</sup>Jonathan Barry, Introduction, Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 38.



Cade's nor Suffolk's curses have any particular effect, nor do they particularly illuminate anyone or anything to come.

Not so Henry's speech. Henry does not curse; he prophesies. Gloucester also prophesies, but, like York's cursing of Joan, his prophecy requires little forethought, and a minimum of human perception and political savvy: "Lordings, farewell; and say, when I am gone, / I prophesied France will be lost ere long."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, with his clear, almost other-worldly sight, Henry nominates the young Richmond for England's saviour in 2 Henry 6 and bestows upon him his blessing. And, as Richmond is the only monarch in the plays to have received a king's blessing, Richmond eventually conquers. Those who do not receive, or deny blessings, like Richard, fail. Richard denies his mother's blessing; with Margaret acting the role of masculine monarch, Henry's blessing is tantamount to a mother's blessing as well as a monarch's. Henry prophesies again in 3 Henry 6 V.vi, when speaking to Richard. The prophecy confirms Henry's nobility, and, inversely, his womanliness, for prophecy, particularly literary and classical prophecy, is predominantly the realm of women or sexually ambiguous characters. The Sibyls, the Pythonesses, Cassandra, Circe, even Chiron's daughter were all women; the most famous non-female prophet, the blind Tiresias, spent time as a woman; even the Weïrd Sisters display prominent sexual ambiguity. Still, though Henry's last prophecy requires little foresight, it does set the tone for Richard III:

And thus I prophesy: that many a thousand  
Which now mistrust no parcel of my fear,  
And many an old man's sigh, and many a widow's,  
And many an orphan's water-standing eye -  
Men for their sons', wives for their husbands',  
Orphans for their parents' timeless death -  
Shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>I.i.144-45.

<sup>16</sup>V.vi.37-43.

Margaret begins to curse in Act III of 2 Henry 6, shortly after she has started to **seize** political power. To the retreating backs of Henry and Salisbury she calls:

Mischance and Sorrow go along with you!  
 Heart's Discontent and sour Affliction  
 Be playfellows to keep you company!  
 There's two of you; the Devil make a third!  
 And threefold Vengeance tend upon your steps!<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on Margaret's character shifts slightly. Her words echo, not Joan's, the French sorceress, but Salisbury's, who in I.i.179 states, "Pride went before, Ambition follows him." From the unwitting aid of French evil, Margaret progresses throughout the rest of the tetralogy to avenging angel. The triple utterance of the lines act not only as curse but as prophecy. With her words, Margaret effectively invokes both the Fates, who control destiny, and the Furies, the Erinyes, who punish those who sin against family. Later in 2 Henry 6 Henry opines, "Was ever king that joy'd an earthly throne, / And could command no more content than I?" and the Henry who manages to call his crown content in 3 Henry 6 III.i is a Henry who has suffered much and who indeed will suffer little more. All major characters, from this point onward, suffer from the presence of heart's discontent; affliction and vengeance also increase in frequency until Richmond halts the whole action. Margaret's utterance is therefore more accurate, though it misses half of its specific mark.

Suffolk is the next to curse, yet despite his "selfish advantage," he does so only at the behest of Margaret, and his curses are in effect not curses at all, but an attempt to please the woman he loves. Despite this, he scores some random hits: Richard commands basilisk imagery; a woman's touch can be said to be softest, and women's touches bring precious little balm in the plays; "the consort" can mean queen consort, and oft-times in the tetralogy queens do recognise and bewail death, as the screech of the owl is said to do.

Shakespeare structures III.ii carefully. Suffolk is as biddable to her suggestion to curse as she was to his proposal of marriage in 1 Henry 6 V.i, though he breaks off

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<sup>17</sup>III.ii.299-303.



to protest halfway through line 308 and does not resume till line 319. Then it is Margaret who breaks him off. In the "You bade me ban, and will you bid me leave?" of Suffolk's, Margaret's "Go; speak not to me; even now be gone. / O! go not yet," and all ensuing dismissals and recalls, one can hear the echoes of the banter and the pseudo-comings and -goings of their first scene together.

Margaret concludes the cursing in 3 Henry 6 after the death of her son, and directs it at the York boys: "You have no children, butchers; if you had, / The thought of them would have stirr'd up remorse: / But if you ever chance to have a child, / Look in his youth to have him so cut off / As, deathsmen, you have rid this sweet young prince!" She repeats herself at her exit: "So come to you and yours as to this prince!"<sup>18</sup> The York children, most particularly Richard, have no remorse to be stirr'd up and overcome, as Margaret had at the death of their father. She steels herself to display the control she needs to torment York, and even so doing, recognises the state he is in: "Alas, Poor York! but that I hate thee deadly, / I should lament thy miserable state."<sup>19</sup> Margaret, unlike York, curses her tormentors effectively. Margaret does achieve comfort. Edward spares her life, though that seems scant comfort enough to Margaret, who had asked for death; also, all of the York children suffer untimely deaths or bereavements, with the exception of Richard, by whose agency all is carried out. Clarence's children are not killed, but they are so obscured as to make them nonextant.

With Richard III the reversal of dramatic opinion on Margaret is complete. Husbandless, childless, and homeless--for she returns from emotionally sterile exile in France to the England which banished her--she should be powerless, but she is not. Her effect is felt throughout the play by all characters, to such an extent that Elizabeth and the Duchess petition her for help. Like Mother Sawyer in The Witch of Edmonton, Margaret lives now firmly in the realm of the liminal. She is past

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<sup>18</sup>3H6 V.v.80.

<sup>19</sup>3H6 V.v.84-85.

childbearing, in the twilight of life, a lone Lancastrian in the state of York. She inhabits a realm which is neither here nor there, and lurks in the wings throughout Richard III, as she admits in IV.iv.3-4: "Here in these confines slyly have I lurk'd / To watch the waning of mine enemies." Her words shape Richard III; her power is everywhere. Richard, who early in 3 Henry 6 scorns Margaret ("A woman's general; what should we fear?") has learned Margaret's power by the end, and--quite rightly, from his perspective, and taken with the hindsight of Richard III--upbraids Edward for staying his hand with the significant line "Why should she live to fill the world with words?"<sup>20</sup>

Bitter though she may be, essentially friendless, contemporary of none save the Duchess of York, no one in the play except Richard can or does lay any charge of villainy on Margaret in Richard III. In fact, she becomes a rallying figure for the women of the play (all save Anne), who sue to her to grant them some of her power. Anne's curses are heavily ironic. She curses Richard's children to be, in effect, mirrors of him (though he suffers the barrenness wished on him earlier by Margaret); and she curses his wife, whom she will become. And, as has been noted, Anne's curses summon Richard to the stage.

Elizabeth asks Margaret to teach her to curse, but lacks the verbal strength to assume the power--Elizabeth's verbal strengths lie in parrying, not attack. The Duchess of York attempts to become Margaret's successor, but Richard can ignore his mother, just as he refused her blessing. She ends with an exiting curse, but she prophesies only what Margaret already has done, that Richard will come to no good end.

Richard does not attempt to discredit Margaret's curses, and he does try to reflect them. There is no point in attempting to avert something if it has no power in the first place. That Richard holds cursing in awe, especially just cursing, is evident in I.iii.318-19 ("So do I ever--(speaks to himself) being well advis'd; / For had I cursed

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<sup>20</sup>3H6 I.iii.68; V.v.43.



now, I had cursed myself"). Keith Thomas, in Religion and the Decline of Magic, analyses the construction of the "just" curse in early modern beliefs, which Barry summarises, noting that Thomas's "discussion of cursing is dominated by the theme of guilt, and so revolves around the notion of a 'justifiable' curse, one which the accuser [i.e., the one crying out against the curser] could fear, feel guilty about. . . ."21 Richard, a self-professed villain who will stop at nothing, has much to fear from just retribution.

Hammond attempts to discount Margaret and her curses: "Margaret's curses come true, not because she utters them, but because in the circumstances their fulfillment is entirely probable. Many things happen in the play which are not foretold by her. . .and some things which she prophesies do not come true (Elizabeth is not left childless, for instance)."22 This is an overly modern and cynical viewpoint. If curses had no effect, Richard would not bother to try to avert them. If Shakespeare had wanted to undercut Margaret's prophetic powers, he would not make each character refer back to them as they were proved true. Nor would he have staged the dénouement of the play around a cursing scene. And if Elizabeth is not left childless, she is left sonless--which may be, for Margaret or the audience, enough.

Analysis both of Margaret's curses and her prophecies proves that she is just as much Henry's successor as she was Joan's. Her words petition God. To Elizabeth's statement of her heart's discontent at being queen, Margaret adds: "And lessen'd be that small, God I beseech him."23 Likewise, when Richard states "Poor Clarence did forsake his father Warwick, / Ay, and forswore himself--which Jesu pardon," Margaret adds a "Which God revenge."24 Margaret's sympathies are still with Warwick. Her loyalty, once given, is never revoked or perjured, unlike almost any

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<sup>21</sup>Barry 38.

<sup>22</sup>R3 110.

<sup>23</sup>I.iii.111.

<sup>24</sup>I.iii.135-37.

other characters in the tetralogy. Even Henry forswears himself when he marries Margaret.

Margaret also takes on the role of prophetess, as Henry once was prophet. Though her justice may be eye for eye and tooth for tooth, it is borne out, and throughout the play the characters underline her prophetic powers.<sup>25</sup> Her curses also tread a delicate line between Old and New Testament, as she states when Buckingham tries to discredit the power of anyone's curses:

Marg. Now fair befall thee and thy noble House;  
Thy garments are not spotted with our blood,  
Nor thou within the compass of my curse.  
Buck. Nor no one here: for curses never pass  
The lips of those that breathe them in the air.  
Marg. I will not think but that they ascend the sky,  
And there awake God's gentle sleeping peace.  
O Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog! . . .  
O, but remember this another day  
When he shall split thy very heart with sorrow,  
And say, poor Margaret was a prophetess.  
Live, each of you, the subjects to his hate,  
And he to yours, and all of you to God's.  
Buck. My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses.  
Riv. And so doth mine; I muse why she's at liberty.  
Rich. I cannot blame her. . . .<sup>26</sup>

No less effective because she is in the moral right, Margaret treads the boundary between God's peace and his hate. Richard tries to usurp this power when he retorts that Margaret's misery is his father's curse come true by God's agency, "And God, not we, hath plagu'd thy boody deed." Elizabeth's complacent "So just is God, to right the innocent" and Hasting's "O, 'twas the foulest deed to slay that babe," which, though it may be morally right, wrongly ascribes the guilt to Margaret, demonstrate both irony and foreshadowing. God will right the innocent, but through a Lancastrian agent and a Henrician peace; and more babes will be slaughtered by the hand of the foulest actor of all, Richard.

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<sup>25</sup>See R3 III.iv.92-93, IV.i.44-46, IV.iv.79-80, and V.i.25-27.

<sup>26</sup>I.iii.282-306.



"Why should she live, to fill the world with words?"<sup>27</sup> asks Richard of Edward in 3 Henry 6. Richard himself is a verbal adept, as Richard III demonstrates. He understands the importance and the power of speech. Both Margaret and her words return to haunt the house of York, Richard in particular, at the end of Richard III, when the ghosts of all of those who left the stage without exiting curses reappear to curse Richard and bless Richmond. Margaret's curses have come true, to an extent that even she as the victor surfeits on success; she leaves for France with her hollow victory--or does she silyly lurk in the wings at the end of Richard III as she did in the beginning?--and that cycle of cursing and vengeance ends. The ghosts would start a new one, but by balancing their curses with blessings, Shakespeare avoids a renewal of destruction.

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<sup>27</sup>3H6 V.v.43.

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